

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 58 N°3 SPRING 2008  
SPLIT THIS ROCK CHAPBOOK

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**Split This Rock Chapbook**

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### COVER

**Lee Sharkey**, from *Eyes Wide Open* series, digital photograph, Chicago, 2007

**Mary Greene**, design

### SPLIT THIS ROCK POSTER

**Lee Sharkey**, from *Eyes Wide Open* series, digital photograph, 2007



An arrow at the bottom of a page means no stanza break.

# **SPLIT THIS ROCK POETRY FESTIVAL**

MARCH 20–23, WASHINGTON, D.C.

A CELEBRATION OF OUR TRADITION  
OF POETRY OF WITNESS AND RESISTANCE



SPLIT THIS ROCK CALLS POETS TO A GREATER ROLE IN PUBLIC LIFE AND FOSTERS A NATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ACTIVIST POETS. THE FESTIVAL WILL FEATURE READINGS, WORKSHOPS, PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON POETRY AND SOCIAL CHANGE, YOUTH PROGRAMMING, FILMS, PARTIES, WALKING TOURS, AND ACTIVISM, WHILE WE DEBATE AND ASSESS THE PUBLIC ROLE OF THE POET AND THE POEM IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS.

[WWW.SPLITTHISROCK.ORG](http://WWW.SPLITTHISROCK.ORG)

**EDITORS' NOTE: SPLIT THIS ROCK**

**John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey**

For there is a river.  
In these years of drought.  
There is a river.

For somewhere it has rained.

Yet a hot wind threatens us.  
We walk from one silence to another.

In Beloit, Wisconsin, where this magazine  
sprang from the earth,  
we founded the River of Peace,  
which in October 2002  
flowed along the banks of the Rock River,  
carrying with it the refuse of lies and broken promises.

And in Farmington, Maine,  
where the *Beloit Poetry Journal* has resurfaced,  
we compose a steady stream  
of provocation and witness  
outside the local post office  
in our weekly vigil for peace.

In many such places brooks emerge  
from the mountainside, converge in larger streams,  
in rivers of testimony such as *Poets Against the War*,  
their visible surface just a shimmering  
of what is rushing underneath.

And now Split This Rock.  
This chapbook offers the voices of word-workers  
who water our soil, who resist the desertification  
of our landscape, who come together  
in our nation's capital March 20–23, 2008,  
on the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq,  
to lament, witness, and celebrate.

For although there is nothing one man will not do to another,  
there is also a language of the unheard.  
If we listen we can hear their music,  
and sometimes this music is all we have.

Will we make a new song?

We sit where the world begins,  
at the kitchen table, set as a table of peace  
where we gather—family, friends, and strangers—  
finding strength among those we know  
and through strangers.

For we need each drop, each morsel  
that can nourish us.

In this parched land  
we have squandered much.  
Hibernated in our twig-sack hearts.  
The drought at times has devastated us.  
Is it time now for awareness of our ignorance?

Is it Thursday yet?  
We are thirsty.  
We do not have much time.  
Soon Sunday night will come.

**ROBERT BLY**

**Things Left to Do**

There are so many things still left to do  
At eighty. This poem is one of them.  
Last night in my dream a voice said:  
“If you go through that wall over there—  
A door is under the wallpaper—  
You’ll find a field down by the river.

“A flock of Great Blue Herons live there  
Whom you’ve never seen! Tomorrow  
The mating dances will take place!  
Don’t film them! Your grandmother is one  
Of the herons!” Imagine!  
I’m the grandson of a heron!

**STEPHEN KUUSISTO**  
**Jazz from Cripple City**

I saw tonight four men in wheelchairs eating  
Flowers, laughing through the dusk  
In a public garden.  
Forsythia leaned to the water.  
*Oh to bear up under such rollicking measures. . . .*  
*Oh to live in Buffalo, New York, and eat civic plantings. . . .*

Yes, it's true, I can't see a thing.  
A friend had to tell me about the men who ate from the rhododendrons.  
Her description was full of detail, let us say, as  
The courts are full of law,  
As Doc Williams might have said.

But no one can describe the murmurous laughter that does not  
Alter the case. & the twilight full of sounds. . . .

**STEPHEN KUUSISTO**

**By Halves**

Mind by halves thinks “ethics”—  
Erases ethics, writes “only.”

My uncle washed with gin  
Thought “defensible” since

He was cross, he was tired. . . .  
He lost the book of ethics.

By halves we are ready.  
By halves men storm a beach.

Don’t we whisper in halves?  
I strive to be half a man.

I ache for half the moon,  
Half of love, half the luck song

Sung by the cricket  
Who sings with half his leg.

## ISHLE YI PARK

### Wind

June. Grains of light sift over Wyckoff  
Avenue, dusting strollers shoved  
by thick-hipped mamis with slick, gelled hair.  
Tattered triangular flags blow and click  
like sharp teeth above all heads.  
Angel struts, clasping Hanah's fingers.  
A cool wind ripples his undershirt,  
dares to lift her skirt. Young fools with easy  
grins, they stroll loose-hipped down Hart Street,  
say *wassup* to boys ribboning D's  
Phat Beatz, Sal's Pizzeria.  
Young street king and queen; everyone knows  
his name: *Mira Angel y la China*,  
they hiss. The two own the block,  
walk straight into a hot wind.

**ISHLE YI PARK**  
**Private Dancer**

The door's locked. *Put it on*, she dares,  
flings her denim-lycra dress  
at his feet. He sucks his teeth *no*. She caresses  
his earlobe. *Please*. He huffs . . . straps on buckles. She stares  
as he struts from dresser to bed with a bony hip-jut,  
arm extended like a thin brushstroke of tree.  
He bats his fox lashes to throw shadows over cheek-  
bones, puckers his lips, runs his rough  
palms over her décolletage, then strips  
further. To her cherry-red negligee. He totters in fake heels,  
flings an invisible boa up at the ceiling. She  
laughs, imagines feathers swan-diving past her eyes as he skips  
over now. Done with fantasy, he kneels  
beside her. Hard. Naked. On his bony knees.

**JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA**

***from Huitzilopochtli***

Drake's a pothole patcher on the road of love, and the holes go to the center of the earth where by fire he learns the craft of an artist, hibernating in his twig-sack heart nested in magma-mother womb—the hole goes all the way to the other side of the earth where hummingbird memories burn bright against the dark;

learns to transform them into

the V-8 motor, loved by Elvis and James Dean. He shredded veiled mannerisms, tangled his lungs in flames and color and photos that tied them into a knot until he couldn't breathe and had to breathe sucking sage-shoots.

Submerged in war-jungle waters in his early twenties, seeing life from bloody shores, below water where objects waver as butchered parts of animals and children float by, blurred stacks of despairing hippies, corrupt presidents and broken marriages piled on banks; his charcoal sketches imagined their agony, his welding torch and grinding blade mimicked their screeches, paintbrushes splattering their red dreams of hope against the windshield of canvas.

He learned how his hummingbird heart could hold a redwood tree in one claw, stationary in air.

He learned how to use his mind to bring back the cars and trucks droning by in muffled bellows on lonely stretches of West Texas roads. Their blurred growl shaped his soul and he sensed how the world was driven by V-8 hunger and V-8 vengeance, and he knew the world did not turn on an axis but on the rod projecting out from a V-8 engine as it spun-pecked and scratched with razor talons at his face and arms and legs and eyes and tongue and nose until the veneer of flesh that contained his soul peeled away and he drifted in his colors without pretensions—there were only the cheap Mexican laborers working the stockyards, boxing at night in cantinas, rib-stark steers, weedy jack-rabbits with the longest ears, scalded prairie cacti, cowboys in chewed-up trailers planning on going to Alaska between smoking Pall Malls and sipping wine worse tasting than goat urine.

The hummingbird flew forth into the sorrow of life.

Old secrets for hiding in no longer useful, neighbors telling,  
“Hear ole Buford died climbing down that gulley, doing right he  
was . . . that hill” and “Nellie dropped dead in the barn trying to  
get them hen eggs up. . . .” and his parents’ fighting hinted at  
some part of life maimed and fighting off everything that tried to  
help,

unsettling him, upsurging his sardine-stew blood, boiling his  
hummingbird blood, he descends, descends,  
descends  
to the origins of violence, to the other side of the earth,  
dismantling  
terror with colors, photos, steel installation figures  
and charcoal sketches  
undoing our ways to kill and destroy in greater numbers  
until each day  
is another of the million garage-hearts in America littered with  
greasy engine parts operating on a rapacious appetite to compete  
and devour.

A time of revelations—

burning clever disguises away with his welding torch, breaking  
through with his angle iron, slithering through the crevice into  
snakeskin insight,

his hummingbird heart spread its wings, lost in lilac trellis of  
passion to express what he smelled and heard and imagined and  
touched,

the nectar of the sorrow of life,

flames fluttered out machine-gun exhibits, border dogs,  
sinister devices cleverly disguised as peace instruments,  
invented by scientists and engineers addicted to morbid delight  
of destruction,

the hummingbird rearranged and installed—assault rifles,  
punching bags, wrecked cars—in the **Boxcar**, eulogizing the  
tragic deaths of eighteen Mexicans suffocated behind the locked  
door.

**PATRICIA SMITH**  
**She Sees What It Sees**

*The eye of Hurricane Katrina passes over New Orleans.*

And the levees crackled,  
and baptism rushed through the ward,  
blasting the boasts from storefronts,  
sweeping away the rooted, the untethered,  
bending doors, withering the strength of stoops.  
*Damn!* Like a mantra, drummed and constant comment  
on the rising drink. *Shit!* Skirts shamelessly hefted,  
pants legs ripped away, babies balanced in the air.  
But still, acceptance, flurries of *Ha ha I'll be damned*,  
because breakage has always been backdrop  
and water—well, water sears through us,  
drenches our white garb and reveals the savior's face.  
It has provided hard passage,  
sparkled its trickery,  
and shepherded us to death before.

**PATRICIA SMITH**

**The President Flies Over**

Aloft between heaven and them,

I only babble landscape—what staunch, vicious trees,  
what cluttered road, slow cars. This is my

country the way it was gifted me—victimless, vast.  
The soundtrack buzzing the air around my ears  
continually loops ditties of eagles and oil.  
Aroused instrumentals channel theme songs,  
speaking  
what I cannot.

I can stay hooked to heaven,  
dictating this blandness.  
I don't ever have to come down.  
My flyboys memorize flip and soar.  
They'll never swoop close enough  
to resurrect that other country,

to give name  
to tonight's dreams darkening the water.

I understand that somewhere it has rained.

**ALIX OLSON**

**Dear Diary**

Dear Diary,

I'm soooooo in love with my country! All for now. . . .  
My country's taking me to a parade!

Dear Diary,

Everywhere I turn, I hear people extolling the virtues of my country and telling me how lucky I am to be with her. Even though I admire a lot of things about her (for example, she has a remarkable music collection, fascinating stories, and a real natural beauty), it's still beginning to feel a little claustrophobic!

Dear Diary,

Today, I found out that my country has been telling people to tell me about how great she is! Kinda immature, don't you think? I had guessed she was a little insecure (she's younger than a lot of other countries), but sheesh doesn't my country trust me to think for myself? So, I assured her that I value countries for their kindness, compassion, honesty, and ability to have a sense of humor about themselves. She looked vaguely uncomfortable. My country would never admit it, but deep down I don't think she thinks I'm worthy of her love.

Dear Diary,

I'm getting a little worried about my relationship with my country.

You see, as much as I want to love, support, and nurture her, the one-way giving is starting to feel unhealthy. I mean, sometimes, she doesn't even meet my basic needs and that's just not okay. When I struggled to explain that I need to feel celebrated, not just tolerated, for example, she went "uh-huh, uh-huh," but I got the distinct impression she was only pretending to listen.

And, I've noticed that sometimes my country takes my check-book when she thinks I'm not looking and spends it on stuff like new combat boots for her and her friends.

And then she lectures ME about independence! Something doesn't feel right.

Dear Diary,

Today my country and her best friend, Church, had a huge fight! Secretly, I was glad because Church always looks at me weird, like he wants to take control of Body, and I just know he's dying to get in bed with my country. I said maybe she and Church should cool it for a bit, maybe have a trial separation. My country balked at the suggestion. "I need Church's support," she said.

I think Church should go get laid.

Dear Diary,

I asked my country today if she'll love me when I'm old and gray. She said, "As long as I don't have to go helping you out or nothing." That hurt my feelings because I work hard to provide for my country. Heck, I even pay my country's bills.

Still, we made up, when she told me to take off my clothes and lie spread-eagle on the bed. Then she took pictures and posted them on the internet. But then she said, even though she liked it, it made me a dirty whore. My country sure does give some mixed messages!

Dear Diary,

My country claims she's suffering from multiple-personality disorder. She claims she hears two different voices, she calls them "blue" and "red," but I personally never see any changes in her personality when this happens. So I confided the symptoms to my psychologist friend, who diagnosed her as clinically bipartisan. My country's going on Prozak.

Dear Diary,

Today, my country accused me of betrayal, when I was simply pointing out another country's virtues. This, of course, segued into the topic of non-monogamy, and so I finally felt the courage to tell her that I thought we should open up our relationship. I explained maybe I wasn't the type to settle down with one country. That even if we did live together, I didn't belong to her, that I have loves and allegiances that surpass just one country! First my country pleaded with me, urging me to remember the fun parades she's taken me to, even dragging out some flags as a reminder. When I refused to back down, my country went ballistic, I mean, completely narcissistic, screaming that she would "never stand to be less than #1!" and that I was a free-loving commie disgrace and that I've been flirting with Canada right in front of her face. I yelled that she is always going around meddling with other countries, invading their personal space and breaking their hearts.

I learned that my country sure does not enjoy being attacked back. She shut down, cracked a beer, and turned on the news only she likes to hear—this crap, these platitudes that massage her ego and justify her aggression. It's incessant. I feel powerless. I want constructive discussions. As equals: me and her. But it seems like all my country is looking for is a cheerleader!

Dear Diary,

Today my country and I broke up. A hurricane swept through our relationship; it's irreparable. For all her talk of family values, she's not dependable, she's not reliable. It's all me, me, me; well I need us, us, us. And I can't be in love with a country I don't trust. But me and some friends, we're planning on staging a critical intervention.

Signing off for now,

Grieving American Citizen

*after Borges*

*No one is the homeland.* The myths of history cannot clothe the emperor's nakedness, no speech empower a vote not counted, nor honor the living who are impoverished by our anthems for the dead. No one is the homeland. Not the heroes of our old genocides, the Indian Wars, nor those who sailed west with cargoes of human flesh in chains, nor those in chains who came against their will to work and breed and die in the service of their masters, masters whose sons would be masters of us all today. There are no heroes except the ones who rise to greet the dawn with empty hands and heavy hearts in a brutal time. No oath or pledge reveals what's in the heart or mind. No one is the homeland. Or everyone. For who lives without a country of the heart? And yet we cry, "We!" We cry, "Them!" I pledge allegiance to the kind. Among the exiled, I make my stand. No true democracy can be won at the point of a loaded gun, nor honor found in anthems or cheap paradigms based on the social lie. No one is the homeland. It can't be found in the grandiloquence of pompous village idiots who run for office because they want the power. Nor in the brilliance of the medals on a uniform worn by a man whose thinking is uniform and obedient as he swears his pledge of allegiance. The homeland is a state of grace, of peace, a whole new world that patiently awaits. The homeland is a state of mind, a light flooding the garden, a transcendent moment of compassionate awareness, one extraordinary line in some old poems that reveals or exemplifies a possibility . . . *in time . . . in time . . .*

**E. ETHELBERG MILLER**

**Three Poems**

**1**

When I met Lincoln  
he was outside his office,  
holding his hat like a magician.  
He greeted me in a cordial manner.  
Perhaps he mistook me for Douglass  
or one of the coloreds who helped his wife.  
There were rumors circulating in the city  
that Lincoln had made changes to the second  
draft of the Proclamation. It was now written  
in a style Morrison would one day make famous.  
In other words people would talk about it but not  
read it. I had decided to meet Lincoln after the  
terrible draft riots that took place in New York.  
My wife was Irish and no longer wanted to be seen  
in public with me. I needed help saving my union.  
I was waiting for Lincoln to reach into his  
big black hat and show me the bunny.

**2**

When I met Robert E. Lee he was eating a Southern  
meal. It smelled like Virginia ham. I wasn't sure.  
My family were all Muslims. In our cabin there was a  
quilt with excerpts of Malcolm's *Autobiography* on it.  
Lee had summoned me from my small internet business  
because he was tired of the war. He wanted to take  
a vacation. I told him I could find a good deal, maybe  
a cottage near the Maryland Eastern Shore. I thought about  
throwing in a couple of theater tickets to a play in Washington.  
Maybe Lincoln might be there and Lee and he could talk about  
sports instead of slavery.

**3**

When I met Jefferson Davis it was right after Hurricane Katrina. His entire home had been destroyed. It was as if Sherman had arrived early and was now pulling clothes out of a hamper. Davis was looking for slaves to help with the clean-up. I showed him my personal autographed copy of the Proclamation. He spit and yelled at me. I felt Davis like General Motors was getting ready to lay people off. I needed work. I needed a job. Davis told me to fetch the white sheets that were in the back room. When I found them I noticed there was also a box of hoods nearby. Lately the South was becoming more like Iraq. Every day an abolitionist had to stop a suicide bomber.

**NAOMI SHIHAB NYE**  
**Communication Skills**

It takes all our courage  
with family sometimes.  
Even if we believe in world peace,  
they will find reasons to dislike us.  
I think of Gandhi who said  
he might never have become  
an activist for nonviolence  
if the neighbor boys had not beaten him up.

I am working on speaking to the ones  
who haven't spoken to us in years,  
the ones swinging punches out of nowhere,  
the ones who decided to shun us  
for reasons unknown,  
the ones who wouldn't greet our group  
at the family reunion  
but sat across the swimming pool  
looking wounded.

The strength of strangers  
will help us survive.  
Strangers are so generous.  
They don't know our faults, our flaws,  
so they hope for the best,  
muttering good morning  
when we pass at the bridge.  
The consolation of strangers  
is endless and forgiving.

**NAOMI SHIHAB NYE**

**Heat**

A large snake crawled  
into the air conditioner,  
wrapped itself around the fan.  
The fan crunched loudly  
when it kicked on,  
killing the snake,  
breaking down.

And then there was our country.

1

Three men who look like Bedouin, but are not, pause with their camels in the snow—

Photo shot through a bus window, twenty-nine years ago on the Khyber Pass.

On the radio I thought they said: 'The way the war is disinfected,'  
So I turned the page over and found it blank.

Was. Was. Was. Was, the mad poet said. But the president says no,  
That poet wasn't mad. That poet understood the rent collector.

Rats run closely along a wall, the wall and body always touching.  
If you tear the wall down, rats run closely along the wall's memory.

Flight here uneventful, homicide movie in the main cabin.  
A soldier is writing a story about a soldier writing a story.

Who is afraid? An axe cuts branches, can't cut leaves.  
Wild strawberry not yet bloomed, wild geranium tangled in the monkshood.

In all the photographs, something particular lies in the lower foreground:  
A bare foot or a water jug, a soldier's pocket a cell phone a gun.

Something is red on the floor, I can't see what. A bit of sunlight crosses a  
prisoner's arm.

'The other truth has disappeared, as if it didn't exist.'

Strange headlights in the driveway, and the father of the first dead soldier says,  
'Dog barking three a.m.; there they are.'

2

The guards wear helmets with plastic shields drawn down over their faces.  
The prisoners wear white hoods with black circles drawn to replace their faces.

On the cover of a glossy book, a soldier from my home town uses his rifle to push  
a crowd  
Farther away from the camera. Street noise used as a painter uses paint.

My ancestors were prisoners of war, transported to a colony where half died in  
the first year.  
Their children bought black slaves and became white.

In the foreground, bodies half wrapped in cloth, in shadow. And farther back,  
Behind the black figure of the grieving woman, a pile of white bundles in the sun.

In a sandy ditch, army scouts found the body of a Sioux woman. Shot in the  
throat,  
She had bled so much her foot looked to them like the foot of a white man.

Oil is black. Salt is white. Unless we unwrap the bodies it doesn't matter.  
Once we unwrap the bodies it doesn't matter.

He identified the dead because he had to, then he zipped them back into their  
bags.  
For thirty years that zip so loud he couldn't piss in a public place.

Between the words *man held captive* and the words *stands bound*  
Are twelve words of army-speak and a lot of white paint worn off the wall.

When refugees ask directions, say yes. Clean salt from shoes. White paint  
Over red paint. Conventional forms of lions and the bridge burns all night.

3

Because I was trying to eat less, I woke up hungry in the middle of the night.  
Distant, bloody, tedious, my radio said, and in that order.

Exhibit of work by photographers killed in the war. It is black and white, Hanoi  
is rainy,  
Our plane is leaving and one of the dead has a daughter here wiping her eyes.

When they interviewed a soldier, he said: 'I didn't think anything.'  
A rocket slammed into the sixth floor, out of a helicopter or out of a donkey cart.

Simple black shape of a woman stands posed between a camera and a tank,  
Well-dressed children artfully framed by a soldier's elbow and his gun.

Some of the dead were mercenaries. Helmeted soldiers cry in the street.  
Mad poet stamps and whirls, says every death is one, one, one, one, one.

Open a book. Watch *harbor* turn to *harry*, *army*, *barrow*, *borough*,  
A fortified town, a room with a closed door.

I am buying bread when the war begins. The baker, who has never talked to me  
before,  
Teaches me the word for *oppose*. He says: 'Is this how you feel?'

The girders are green, the sky is clear, the burned bodies hang from orange cords.  
In barracks, soldiers play video games and bang their fists on the air conditioners.

Sleep is a cure for wakefulness, I'm told. My first night home I don't go in.  
I lie down between the cactus and the pines.

4

Beaver-cut trees in an aspen grove. Cutthroat trout in pond shadow.  
Listening to lies on the radio all morning.

There's a grammar for those who are in the room, and a grammar for those who  
aren't.

When a tank shoots through a brick wall, a little piano riff in a minor key.

On a shelf above the television, one toy cyclo cut from a beer can, red and white  
33.

Training jets in pairs buzz low, stampede horses through the barbed-wire fences.

In Hanoi I bought no souvenirs. In Saigon I bought a white stone dragon  
Packed in a box with a pool of red ink.

Five cans of gasoline, two small boys, riding together in a blue cart.  
If you fire shots into the air the boy in the green shirt winces.

In a notebook, my list of belongings: I wanted to leave each thing to its rightful  
heir.

When you walk against wind in a sandstorm, shield your eyes and cover your  
teeth.

The man with the gun is standing up. The man without a gun is lying down.  
The car is red and white the sky is blue the building brown.

I asked what the woman in black was searching for. She said  
For scissors, with which to cut one lock of his precious hair.

When the tree fell, we were lying asleep in grass near the beaver ponds.  
This is why I can say that we were spared.

**PAMELA USCHUK**

**Sunday News on the Navajo Rez**

Stopping at a gas station outside Gallup, where  
stray dogs circle the pumps for snacks from travelers,  
I fiddle with the nozzle, and a white pickup pulls up.  
The woman, my age, wrapped in a red Pendleton coat,  
tells me the obvious, *You have to pay inside first.*  
*Since you want #1, I'll take #2.*  
I thank her, embarrassed I am so punchy from  
eight hours on the road from Tucson,  
just another blonde blown in by wind.

We pump together in pale winter sun. I like her soft face,  
the way the turquoise squash blossom necklace  
nestles like another planet between her lapels, and  
I say something about gas being cheaper here  
than in Colorado. She asks where I'm from.  
She has a daughter in Fort Collins, across the state.

*Oh, you hear something about what happened up in Colorado?*  
We trade what we know about the monster avalanche  
that closed Highway 40. She repeats that her one daughter  
is in Fort Collins, another in Phoenix, and the baby  
at Fort Hood in the service.

*If my daughters were near that place, I'd be. . . .*  
Her lips form the wispy syllables of missing  
in her own language, a stiff breeze through tumbleweed.  
She bows her head and makes a steeple  
with the maternal fingers of one hand that taps atop her heart.

When I ask if she knows whether any people  
were killed by the snowslide, she tells me,  
*We don't have much time for news here,*  
*what with the baby goats and lambs.*

*It's probably better to watch the goats.*  
I recall this afternoon's report—  
3000 U.S. soldiers dead in Iraq.  
Before I can say more, her voice drops  
through my chest like a rock wrapped in black silk.  
*One of our baby goats died this morning.*

→

*It was so beautiful.* For a moment I see  
the kid dancing on its perfect hooves  
in the irises of her dark water eyes.

*I'm sorry,* I say, but my words sound clipped  
in this land of sandstone and sparse grass.  
They blow across the highway and into the path  
of a semi heading north. Even when I start my car  
I can see this woman lift each baby goat  
in the cradle of her large arms and hold it  
to the spot where her fingers tapped out  
the names of her daughters, especially the last  
ready to head out with her company  
to a desert far across the unknown globe,  
where villagers also raise goats  
and avalanches take the form  
of a roadside waiting to explode.

**SONIA SANCHEZ**

**Peace**

*a poem for Maxine Greene*

**1**

Peace. What is it?

Is it an animal? A bird? A plane?

A mineral? A color? A drumbeat?

(doowop doowop doo doo dee doo doo dee)

**2**

Is it a verb? A noun? An adjective?

A prophet with no pockets

circling our paragraphed lives?

(dwoodop bopbop dwowa doo bop doo bop bop bop)

**3**

DuBois said: The cause of war  
is the preparation of war.

DuBois said: The cause of war  
is the preparation of war.

I say the cause of peace  
must be the preparation of peace.

I say the cause of peace  
must be the preparation of peace.

(blaablalabaaaa blue blueeblay blueeblay)

**4**

Shall I prepare a table of peace  
before you in the presence of mine enemies?

Shall I prepare a table of peace?

Will you know how to eat at this table?

(skee dee dee dah dah doo dah bop dah bop bop dah boo)

**5**

Where are the forks of peace?  
Where are the knives of peace?  
Where are the spoons of peace?  
Where are the eyes of peace?  
Where are the hands of peace?  
Where are the tongues of peace?  
Where are the children of peace?  
(peace, peace, ting ting tee tee peeeeee ting ting tee)

**6**

Is peace an action? A way of life?  
Is it a tension in our earth body?  
Is peace you and I seeing beyond  
bombs and babies roasting on a country road?  
(bop bop bop bop bop bop bop bop bopooooouueeeeeee)

**7**

Peace must not be still, we have to  
take it on the road, marching against  
pentagon doors lurking in obscenity.  
Peace must not find us on our knees  
while a country holds hostage  
the hearts and penises of the workers.  
(bleep bleep bleep blueee bleep bleep blueee doo da boom doo da boom)

**8**

Can you say peace? Can you resurrect peace?  
Can you house the language of peace?  
Can you write a sermon of peace?  
Can you populate the chords of peace?  
(dee dee dadum peace la la la la dum peace)

**9**

A long time ago someone said: I think therefore I am.  
A long time ago someone said: I think therefore I am.  
Now we say preemptive strikes therefore we are.  
Now we say preemptive strikes therefore we are.  
(boom boom boom ay ay ay ay boom ay boom ay ayaay)

**10**

Can you rise up at the sound of peace?  
Can you make peace lighter than air?  
Can you make peace sing like butterflies  
until peace becomes the noise of the planet  
until peace becomes the noise of the planet?  
(PeaceEeeeeEeeeeEeeeeEeeeeEeeEeeEeeEE)

**11**

I know as MLK knew that the universe  
is curved ultimately toward justice and peace.  
I know as MLK knew that the universe  
is curved ultimately toward justice and peace.  
For “war is the sanction of failure.”  
For “war is the sanction of failure.”  
(dobam doom-dooooobam doooooo doooooom)

**12**

Martin said a riot is the language of the unheard  
and I say a terrorist’s bomb is the language of the unheard.  
How to make the unheard heard  
without blowing themselves and the world up?  
How to make the unheard heard  
without blowing themselves and the world up?  
(BOOOM BOOM BOOM BOOOMM BOOOOMMM)

**13**

Most Def said: Speech is my hammer  
bang my world into shape  
now let it fall.

I say peace is my hammer  
bang my world into peace  
and let it fall on the eyes of the children.

(Frère Jacques doodoodoo Frère Jacques dooooo doooo dormez-  
vous vous vous vous ding dong ding ding dong ding)

**14**

Where are the forks of peace?  
Where are the knives of peace?  
Where are the spoons of peace?  
Where are the eyes of peace?  
Where are the hands of peace?  
Where are the tongues of peace?  
Where are the children of peace?

**15**

Where are you—you—youuuuuuu (click)  
where are you you you you youuuuu (click)  
you you where are you you  
where you where are youuu (click)  
click—click—you—youuuu (click)

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