

THE FINAL DEFEAT OF MY COLONIALIST BODY,
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(embedded quotes by Allen Ginsberg, Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, Gertrude Stein, bell hooks, Kate Chopin, Clarice Lispector, Audre Lorde, and Mitsuye Yamada)

It was two days after the inauguration of a tyrant who believed in gold only and I wanted to know, when could I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks? Oh in these days my currency was blade-thin and aching.

Once or recently or repeatedly and also on this day I went into a museum and learned about several groups of people who had not been prior known to me. To enter the museum was free.

The building was made of granite or marble or perhaps both. I thought of the pressure of the walls moving downward onto the foundation, grave slow gravity ahoj. In an exercise of colonialist theft I often did yoga from internet videos. It kept me fit. In downward dog I was both regretful and stretching my fingers.

In the museum when I thought of the walls sitting on the foundation I was thinking of my colonialist fingers and not of the several groups of people who had not been prior known to me. My fingernails in the museum reflected the dulllest light, the colonialist dullards.

The knowledge of these peoples' existence was not the same as knowledge of them as peoples. The photographs and dioramas made it seem as if they had been gone a long time but they had not. I thought of the many bodies not there archived. I was surrounded by the oppressed, while not oppressed, but rather: lonely and heinous.

I took an elevator downwards. I purchased a Coca Cola from the vending machine in the basement lunch room, where I imagined several million children had, at one point, et their several million field trip lunches. Beside its long tables I wanted for nothing and everything. What we want is usually said to be all bound up with what we don't have.

By the time I was in my thirties I had not spoken to my parents for some time, and then they had died. They had died; they were never dying; which is to say I had never seen them dying. In my forties my body had become suddenly lush and then I practiced the choreography of the colonialist yoga and became strong also.

In this new iteration of my body I thought often of my old one, knocking about the halls of malls and high schools and temp jobs. In those days most of us had been socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking. We had not taken time to figure out the roots of our perceptions. All around me girls and women were veiling in the bland wants of provocation. Many wanted a man, men, or a person, or a drink on the patio of a restaurant that was too expensive. I did not want anything then or now, with my body or mind.

For my desire had been trained by my parents to be taken in small swallows. I do not mean a bird but could. Rather I mean a winsome biological act. I would have yielded to any man's desire, not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us.

Now, away from men, in my colonialist body, I had tried to attend talks and view art and consume culture by those groups whose existence to which I had once been unacquainted. This habit was colonialist also. I was drinking this Coca Cola out of its plastic bottle. It had been too expensive for what it was, two dollars and a quarter, too expensive for what it tasted like, and also too cheap for those who had labored to manufacture and distribute it. I had my blade-thin currencies and each time I doled out too many coins I felt guilt.

When I had a family I'd had a cousin, our wealthiest cousin, who had attended a famous and wealthy college to study playwriting. Though in the end she did not continue her art practice but rather attended business school and later became an executive at Coca Cola. She'd had many sons, seven or eight, and each of them had a self-styled way of speaking about the world they had been borne into. Each punctuated declarations with a familial grin I was always disappointed to find charming.

In the basement of the museum I was drinking this Coca Cola and think-

ing of these seven or eight sons and what they would wreck in the world. A friend of mine once remarked that there is something of the charlatan in all of us. I had to agree. I could feel the charlatan inside me, haunting me, and in them, though they would never know or be demanded to know.

I began to walk through the museum basement halls where it was clear I was not to be: there was no longer drywall nor any sign of marble or granite but rather unfinished walls and sweating pipes. I walked down these dim halls and continued to turn corners and to think of each son as if they were the progressive turns of a fairytale but found they blended together in my mind, a cantaloupe-colored miasma. This felt and looked sinister, in my mind, I mean.

I thought of the cousin, their mother, I no longer had. Last word she had lived in Bentonville in order to serve on boards alongside Wal-Mart executives and thus could be indirectly tete-a-tete, gamely anti-antitrust, while shopping in the picturesque downtown district where no chain but Wal-Mart was allowed. In the square there was, one or another son had once explained, a Wal-Mart bakery and a Wal-Mart butcher, and a Wal-Mart stationery store, and so on, so one could skip along from one to the next as if you were an untroubled Parisian in the late 1800s. I had nodded politely and said how that must be nice. Of course I was lying. Or performing. Or perhaps merely having a family.

The two of us had been standing, then, on a balcony during a wedding reception. He was not yet eighteen but would be soon and I thought to myself that he would be a man who would not change the world for other people in a positive way, but nor would I, would I? I had been thinking of tipping myself over the balcony in an unserious and even comical way.

Now I was drinking a Coca Cola in the basement of a museum in the nation's capitol. I was an orphan and bristling with my lonely desire for nobody. I was interested in what I, an average white woman of privilege, could do. I thought I could perhaps change a single stream of denting and change it hurriedly, and then walk away politely before anyone noticed. White women do their best work politely. That's not true. And yet!

The basement hall smelled wetly of iron. I thought how I had not been able to touch the destruction within me. I was a seething isolationist, an unproductive non-member. There was a door marked exit, and "fire alarm

will sound,” and I took it and no alarm sounded. Below a loading dock, in a wide and clear alley, I spat out my last swallow of Coca Cola, its cheap rich sweet. The day was sunny and I would have rathered it gray, for the better to think and be Romantic in my solitude.

I wanted to turn left and traverse the brown trampled grasses of the Mall and find the deep steps of the Capitol building and light myself there, ablaze to provide warmth for those around, for any who needed it. This is the deep-seated guilt of an ignorant white woman. Do not listen to me. One stands against the wind for a time, and then succumbs eventually, because there is no point to being stubborn against all odds. I am being flattened against the cruel curve of the world and there are others better suited, more embodied, than I. The wind will not respond to entreaties anyway.

I will soak my scarf and trousers in gasoline. I will wear a hat with a brim to hide my eyes. I will then coax the spark, its primal function, to eat me. The wind will go on, across the Mall and its obelisk sentry, its monuments and misers, and, me. The wind will spread my bodily conflagration outward and upward, which, swelling, will spread softly orange, its center fat and violet. Granite and marble—granite and marble gain nothing from flame.

SOURCES

1. “When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?” (Allen Ginsberg, “[America](#)”)
2. “What we want is usually said to be all bound up with what we don’t have.” (Fred Moten & Stefano Harvey, “[We Want A Precedent](#)”)
3. “In those days most of us had been socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking. We had not taken time to figure out the roots of our perceptions.” (bell hooks, “[Feminism Is For Everybody](#)”)
4. “She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us.” (Kate Chopin, [The Awakening](#))
5. “A friend of mine once remarked that there is something of the charlatan in all of us. I had to agree. I can feel the charlatan inside me, haunting me.” (Clarice Lispector, “[Charlatans](#)” from [Cronicas](#))
6. “Change a single stream of denting and change it hurriedly, what does it express, it expresses nausea.” (Gertrude Stein, [Tender Buttons](#))
7. “I have not been able to touch the destruction/within me./But unless I learn to use/the difference between poetry and rhetoric/my power too will run corrupt...” (Audre Lorde, “[Power](#)”)
8. “One stands against the wind for a time, and then succumbs eventually because there is no point to being stubborn against all odds. The wind will not respond to entreaties anyway, one reasons; one should have sense enough to know that.” (Mitsuye Yamada, “Invisibility Is An Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of An Asian American Woman,” from [This Bridge Called My Back](#))

NOTE

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