

"Monologue for Saint Louis" (1984)

by Colleen McElroy (1935 – 2024)



home again and the heart barely there
when choked by clusters of words
thick as the clumps of blue-black
grapes we snatched every summer
from the neighbor's arbor (1)
succulent pockets of flesh laced
with green staining our lips and fingers

it is summer again and I am home
vowing penance (2) for all my disappearances
since that first summer
when the arbor was clotted

with pockets of grapes latticed on each
interlocking vine

now earthworms have trellised the arbor
and that crumbling heap of rotting black
sticks cannot shield us from wind or words
we are the women we whispered about each summer
familiar houses and schoolyards have disappeared
childhood streets are blocked with singular black
one-way signs aligned like a lacework
of warnings or accusing fingers

I am home again
and my cousins sit in their cloaks of black
skin dragging me through twisted vines
of genetic maps thick with childhood vows

they remember each summer
how each year I vowed to return home
forever but I am lost in a riddle of words
home is a vacant lot its back yard clotted
with a stainless-steel arch (3) and clusters
of tiny parks sprouting like trelliswork

enclosing some strange summer
resort my cousins have disappeared
into like the shadows of beasts and bad air
that infect this flat country and I am home
a stranger in love with words
with tart sweet clusters of poems

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1: vining plants trained to grow over a lattice, framework, or trellis

2: an act that demonstrates regret and offers amends through self-sacrifice

3: the Gateway Arch, a 630-foot-tall arch located in a national park

Learn more about Colleen J. McElroy:

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