

dog without a bone & *ardent* the spark

By

Kathleen Hellen

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Kathleen Hellen shares two powerful poems with Fleas. The first is entitled (including instructions: stage directions?), 'dog without a bone With pastiche of lyrics from the Doors' "Riders on the Storm" and "(Ghost) Riders in the Sky" by Stan Jones' Be very afraid, the meters running. "a whisper echoes the principle of hope— / wild, like a bull, terrifying." In 'ardent the spark,' "the forethought / lit up like bone- / fire," "transformative energy / kindling the cult..." She leaves me riveted, writhing, pinned and wriggling on the wall...(Spacing is poet's own.) HS*

dog without a bone

*With pastiche of lyrics from the Doors' "Riders on the Storm" and
"(Ghost) Riders in the Sky" by Stan Jones*

I was thrown into the world

when all at once a mighty herd

of red-eyed cows thundered

through the ragged skies, their hooves

a bolt of fear coming hard—

yippie-yi-o yippie-yi-yay

—the story goes... a killer or a cowboy

riding out to storm, when suddenly

a whisper echoes the principle of hope—

wild, like a bull, terrifying

ardent the spark

the forethought

lit up like bone-

fire, mouth of the gods

fire-

breathing

mouth of the boy

rescuing death

AR 15-style, strapped to his chest

transformative energy

kindling the cult

wedded to rampage

Come on baby means you are dead

THE POET SPEAKS: *Perhaps it was the floods, from the central U.S. to the East Coast. I don't remember the precise reason, but I re-read The Epic of Gilgamesh. The catalyst for the pastiche "dog without a bone" was in "The Story of the Flood," in which the phrase "riders on the storm" is given context:*

With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; it thundered within where Adad, lord of the storm was riding.... Then Ishtar the sweet-voiced Queen of Heaven cried out like a woman in travail: "Alas the days -of old are turned to dust because I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all the gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people.... (from Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hebrew Literature)

The "riders on the storm" took me from the epic to the "ghost riders" of the outlaw cowboy song, to Ishmael Reed's "I Am a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra," to the rock classic "Riders on the Storm." My poem is a mash-up of genres and images that evoke the human condition in the death throes of this century: In this apocalyptic vision we are simultaneously killer and cowboy, hopeless and hopeful.

"ardent the spark" was written in response to the August 2020 fatal shootings in Kenosha, Wisconsin. As I watched the video footage leading up to, and during, the shootings, I was struck by how the 17-year-old shooter from Illinois seemed the agent of passions that have gripped our country like a fire that consumes and transforms. I thought of Agni, in Vedic scriptures, as mouth of the gods and through which offerings are conveyed in sacrificial fire, as messenger between the deities and human beings so we can see and know what we have become. The last line of the poem intends the duality, with Jim Morrison's "Light My fire" evoking the trope of sex as death.

AUTHOR BIO: Kathleen Hellen's collection *meet me at the bottom* is forthcoming in Fall 2022 from Main Street Rag. Her credits include *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin*, her award-winning collection *Umberto's Night*, published by Washington Writers' Publishing House, and two chapbooks, *The Girl Who Loved Mothra* and *Pentimento*. Featured on *Poetry*

Daily and Verse Daily, her work has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *jubilat*, *Massachusetts Review*, *New Letters*, *North American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Rumpus*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Subtropics*, *The Sycamore Review*, *Waxwing*, and *West Branch*, among others.