

MASTER OF THE DANCE

and other poems with art work

by Lito Silva

By Maria Straw-Cinar

WHY WE LIKE IT: Poetry editor Hezekiah writes...

If you despise poetry, as I do, you just have to buck up and read THIS. It is unlikely you will experience anything quite like it. Frankly, Straw-Cinar's poetry is too good for a rag like FLEAS and a ham-fisted panhandling PhD editor. I am in love with her words...

Master of the Dance

In an attempt to highlight quotes from this work, I wound-up merely rewriting it. The imagery has universality and its theme might be something native to us all. Just start it and dare yourself not to be transfixed by the end.

Nossa Infancia

For those who share my limited ability to translate what I suspect might be Portuguese, 'Our Childhood.' I wouldn't wish for my fellow unilingual readers to pass up on this one. 'Skipping hoops, skidding stones,' 'glisten like glarneys,' 'mandarin sunbeams,' 'flutters of pencil-sharpenings curling.' It goes on, and so could I. Imagine being read bedtime stories by the one who submitted this? Another fine reason FOTD could no longer resist publishing poetry.

Hot heat Jazz

I wish there were fewer submissions so I could get some sleep. But my dreams pale in comparison. This has got to be the most erudite piece of rap I have ever not listened to. I would like to think it has been set to music because it transcends poetry. Somewhere Leonard Cohen is heartbroken lamenting not having written it. Omit it at your peril.

Nossa ['Our' if you remember] Dance

Pretty cheeky sending a compilation of greatest hits, like this, in the edition inaugurating all things poetical—we'll press on: 'treble cleft hearts,' 'bodies curve / quotation marks / leaning toward their / future' There are lots more to choose, pick your own.

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It's time for me to cease my inferior critiques before I get a not-so-mild crush on the anonymous person who wrote this stuff. By now, if you've loved these, you'll love them all and probably already read the rest... no sense me clattering on in my comparative pedestrian manner. I'm only allowed so much space. Still I couldn't help denoting some singular highlights. Let the Artist speak:

Eden: 'Him / formless and empty / dusted off Man' ...the curse of the 'y' chromosome.

Afeto: [Affair or affection, I think,...for readers like me] 'cutcake moulds / blasted in the / ancient kiln'

The Exchange: Can't isolate a single line, maybe, 'you whisper through my skin'

Middle Earth: Primigravida, look it up, I had to. I felt exactly the same way during my first pregnancy. Though I could never have expressed it like this.

Roots of Love: This one is so beautifully erotic, I was obliged to offer myself a short break.

A-feto: ['A fetus']—from an affair to a fetus...you gotta love this language. Aurum means gold, I think, I am sure to be fired as resident poetaster: 'dawnstrains' downstream. Maybe I'm getting a little overwhelmed.

I'm giving up scribbling verse and sticking to poker. Read 'em and weep and rejoice...feast on the pictures if they publish them as well. H. S.



Master of the Dance

Hidden in history's huts,
the beat rises –
hands become drums,
servants master their bodies
manoeuvre and slide secret
coded *rodas* to
free the slaveself
from shackles

break the Cakewalk
topping of sugarsweet
blackgold sold to stiffen
the upper lip

Fight dance macabre
out of huts of history

flappers flap,
plantations slap slaves
slap back, dance as
the whip cracks-a-way
smacks the Black Bottom
with Charleston flicks as
Lindy hopping white women
kick away pencil thin lives.

hands clapping, rapping rhythms of life...

slavemaster stabs a steak through
cardinal dancing hearts –
take his clothes, strip his soul
stomp him down; but his burnet
blanket shining skin bounds and leaps
frisks and frolicks, kicks and screams

Gene Kelly *singing in the rain*
came from slave pain.

Caporeira do you dare
dance in shadowlight
cat-like whips and hisses,
razor blades grasped tightly,
silvery toes glint and strike
fork-lightning flashes –
slashed in a blink of an eye
slaveprints shape new skies

Now the slavemaster's blighted
blackgold crops fight back.
It's just a dance
dance, swish, kick
fat cat owl sees no pussy cat now,
twisted purrs,
contorted Houdini escapees
find the key,
hips slash and sway
as the juke box plays –
like last summer.

Language divides, bodies collide
in connecting ecstasy
and secret silent wars
masters swore to stop –

Achilles heel cut;
Let them never dance again.

...

And the masters sit on porches,
cocks in the hoop,
sundowner drinks clink,
night's auric rush
sinks into sheltering sky

Yet faintly, in the distance
of deadly blackgold skies,
a sound that never ceases,
urgent as the first-
born's heartbeat,
still, the tap tap tap,
drumming, endless thumbing
rolling spools of memory –
the slave dance springs
eternal, blossoming heat of life –

a drum a drum
the slave doth come.



Nossa Infancia

Skimming hoops, skidding stones, new bones frizz with glory pinging
round the china bowl days that glisten like glarneys,
voices hollowing out the sky, then home to motherlove, bedded and warm;
lying looking at the stars, diamond punched bliss, Mama's tender kiss
wrapping up the night – mandarin sunbeams awaken sleepy bye eyes –
flutters of pencil-sharpenings curling, unfurling to flight;

a whisper of moths heading for light,

tongues not yet tied announce all they see, tulip lips, sharp and sweet
as lemony wine, taste symphonies planted deep down in memory;
new knees skinned – drops of blood splash sorrel sands like raspberry
tarts laughter stretches apricot sky, fills air with dew no adult can crush,
quash, quell – belly laughs spiral and swell rubious apple peels
helicoptering heavens, airborne howls and roars of joy bodyshaking
delights, vibrate and quake the earth's erythraean core.

Oh! Cracked and spider-veined planet, rejoice in these tiny taps on
your stilton-bruised brain; head cut – scarred indelible, keep running,
into forever, unstoppable.



Hot heat Jazz

Call and response notes float over killing fields,
spiritual stories – nuggets of blackgold
boldy hollered across snowy cotton fields,
sound of music hanging in air laying bare
a hard day's nightache

Rising from rags in time into the mix, European clicks
Irish jigs, German waltzes, French quadrilles
New Orleans schmaltz and sass
all that jazz

Ragtime!
Flappers chop their hair
Americans throw caution...
swing to new rhythm,
synchronicity glides,
shades of blue
Gillespie-life fizzy
notes spinning ol'



Nossa Dance

Semi-quavers quiver
bent-double
on the dancefloor,
tender is the night,
moonlit bodies bob
with the current,
treble cleft hearts
spin solo, all souls
now one –

punctuated movement,
semi-colonials of the night's
exclamations, abbreviations –

a ricochet of notes
slip slyly away
from the saxophone's
crushed crescendos –
midnight's ellipsis...
bodies curve
quotation marks
leaning towards their
future



Eden

In the beginning...Him
formless and empty
dusted off Man
lying beneath the Knowledge Tree
tossed a spare rib
to seed a woman
skin and blistered
Soon they knew
flat-bellied serpent
forked tongue stung,
tied and muted
a couple of swells
damned in time.

Him.

And in the end, she,
cow-heft , colossal
taut as a drum,
face-lifted
ready for the final fling –
ribs, hips and bone
shift and flood
uncrumpling life,
canyon echoes

hang in her hair –

Her.



Afeto

slit-moonfruit, slippery skin
hardens, pips and seed
bleed this quiet room
hanging bat blind as
curled up grace,
two-faced twin –
dreams in waiting

inside the cave walls
lingering with intent
lallygags this bodydouble,
cyclopic seahorse
with one-eye on the prize,
scaffolding skin shapes –
cutcake moulds
blasted in the
ancient kiln

moon into sun,
then a cry –
a sound so old
swelling up from the earth
that first O

now broken.
the division
is done.

The Exchange

Mum, bird-like, vulnerable,
slain by this raw war,
wheeled around like cargo
on the way to X-ray,
hell's waiting room,
the cavernous lift-mouth
ready to swallow you whole,
slowly, you turn and smile,
wry-eyed trickster
stroking my belly
with your soft-punctured hands,
you're on the way in,
you whisper through my skin:
I'm on my way out.

Flashbulb blasts,
cancerous illuminations
ignite the fallow field,
chemo's dread shots,
death's decoy
phosphorous pin-pricks
devouring your insides.

And then you...

Your hand flutters inside,
butterfly fingers flicker
your still beating heart
ta ra pa pum pum
urgent, pulsating me
and my drum desperate
to be known,
the swamp-like scan
revealing tiny limb
and bone, acrobatic
tumbler in the spin
of life

this is the spirit world

and all the monitors
in this whitecure-scape
cannot fathom
 the depths
 we feel.

Middle Earth

Mother, the face of all roots –
middle-aged-birthers need their Mothers,
Mama now themselves, Primigravida, later Mater;
childlike until Mother's hood darkens the path,
no book to show the way – middle-earth Mother
neither here nor there, freedom gone
along with Mother's love, now you are the Mother,
but know not what you do, middle-earthed,
the child and the ancient pull both ways
as baby cries for you, just you,
but who can you cry to
only the empty space
the lost place
shaped
Mother



Roots of Love

Pushing down into forever
embedded in the soil's soul
rooted in histories of love
We are made from clay
the earth creaks as your love shifts
planets collide to the sound of your kiss
where does it come from?

You give me edible glitter made of stars
awakening spasms of spangled dust
silver-swarm fallout
(ashes) lain dormant for years
We are magnificent

Splayed and slopped in the dirt
we root our pleasure into perfect skin
and bones, set in stone
like two muddied gods
wrestling in the dark
bloodhounds of love
listening to the earth's beating heart
We are magnificent

Searing of the roots
earthquakes shake us –
Mercury forces us back
erases the oceans,
ravages the forests
the mad moon is pulling

the roots from the trees.

We were once magnificent.

A-feto

tiny dragon flames,

keying our aurum hearts

precious wail rises

bloating air

balloons a-fresh

dawnstrains

newly

born

a-feto

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *A chance meeting with the talented artist Lito Silva led us to collaborate on this project, 'Afeto', using the rhythms and themes of his paintings to inspire the poems. In Portuguese the word has a dual meaning, affection and fetus (afeto/a-feto). I then discovered the word 'ekphrastic' meant putting words to images, it seemed such a fantastic word so I went on to curate an Ekphrastic exhibition, readings can be found on my Facebook page Poetry Live Maria Straw-Cinar. <http://www.facebook.com/mariastrawcinar>*

As well as organizing my own readings, I have read at The Arts Night, Kilburn and The Poetry Café open mic nights, the thrill and energy of live readings is exciting for me as a poet as the words and sounds transform and transport us somewhere other, elsewhere, time out of mind as Dylan would say. I have always loved Bob. I am thrilled to say that my collection was nominated for the Ted Hughes Award 2019 for innovation in poetry. Here's to more chance meetings!

BIO: *Maria Straw-Cinar is a poet, writer, actress and teacher. Her debut novel **girl** was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press Novel Award. In 2016 she published a poetry collection, **Flamenco**, with Lulu Press and her play, **Vinegar Alley**, was long-listed for the Papatango Award. Her website 'Poetry and Other Pleasures' mariastrawcinar.blog showcases her new projects as well as her past work.*

*She is currently a Doctorate researcher at De Montfort University working on a practice-based creative PhD. **The Resurrection Women**, developing a TV drama, **Wild Women of Paris**, about Natalie Barney and the female artists and writers living in Paris in the 1920's.*

She aims to create more female-centric narratives and bring to life inspirational women in history in her writing for theatre, film and television.

girl will be published by the **Blue Nib Press** in Spring 2020. Visit them at <https://thebluenib.com>