

# 3 (Three) Poems

By Lauren Scharhag

*Poetry editor Hezekiah writes... It has always been my confessed contention that ambiverts make the best Tarot card readers. I am also one. Lauren Scharhag has a mouthful-surname but her poetry is extraordinary. 'Virtual Cloister' is one such. Here, she is one funny, angry gal, "It's not even the dick pics that get me." "dry-humping at shadows." "a solipsistic affair." Now, we have that out of the way... "You ought to wear your hair up." Here is hoping you get the direct message. I '...love Lou Diamond Phillips' as well, and who doesn't love '...a fat girl [?]' (Spacing and font size are poet's own.) HS*

## Virtual Cloister

It's not even the dick pics that get me.  
They're in the same category as old-timey flashers  
prowling public spaces in trench coats,  
no doubt enjoying the breeze against their balls,  
dry-humping at shadows.  
Dick-pic senders seem to expect nothing.  
It's all one-sided, a solipsistic affair.

Nor is it the ones who invite me to sext.  
At least they're up-front about it. Mostly.  
They might lead off with something like,  
*You have a nice smile,*  
(My pictures are almost invariably from the neck up  
to discourage more explicit compliments)  
then quickly segue to the request  
for tedious, sticky fumlings  
and they're not even as charming  
as Hannibal Lecter innuendos.

No, it's the ones who slip into my inbox  
by striking up conversation.  
Young men rush to impress me with their vast knowledge.  
(They never ask if I'm already acquainted with the subject.)

In fact, they ask me nothing about myself.)  
If we were talking together in person, I guess,  
they'd preen and flex their muscles,  
like birds of paradise showing off their dance moves.  
Older men love to reminisce about their travels,  
their wars. They tell me about their dogs.  
They pat me on the head (virtually)  
and dispense advice like, *Appreciate the moment.*  
*Before you know it, it's gone.*  
and *You ought to wear your hair up.*  
And I wonder how old they think I am,  
or why they think they're qualified  
to tell me I "ought to" anything.  
Then come the implied sighs,  
the, *Oh, how I wish I had someone.*  
*It would be so nice to come home*  
*to a good woman.*  
*I love a good massage—both getting them and giving them.*  
I don't know if they're drunk or if, somehow,  
they've never heard the sound  
of their own voices.

And then, there's the lone woman who says  
she'll show me her tits if I show her mine.  
I think about it. Tat for tat.

Then I add to my profile, *No DMs, please.*

## All the West Side Girls Love Lou Diamond Phillips

Summer of '88 and *La Bamba*  
was released on VHS.  
Us West Side kids  
had found our idol.

Before that, we got excited  
whenever Speedy Gonzalez  
appeared on our TV screens.  
There was an old Chevy Chase  
film my mother loved mostly  
for the sassy Mexican cook  
with whom she shared a name,  
Aurora, and we loved anything  
with Cheech Marin. If there were  
other bits of Mexico in pop culture  
at the time, I'm hard-pressed  
to think of them. (Desi Arnez  
was Cuban. Also: black-and-white.  
No, thank you.) But we held them  
to our hearts like talismans.

Mexicans were still exotic back then  
in the way that Italians were exotic  
in 1905. My friends didn't know  
what a tamal was. When they came  
to dinner, they tried to eat it  
husk and all. The only Mexican restaurants  
in town served tacos in store-bought shells,  
and everything came with a side  
of refried bean puree, smothered  
in white cheese that was like a mockery  
of queso fresco. But suddenly,  
everyone knew the song, "La Bamba."  
They played it everywhere,  
at the supermarket, at school dances,  
and even the white girls agreed,  
Lou Diamond Phillips was so cute.

He wasn't even Latino,  
but we loved him anyway.

My tío made bootleg copies  
for everyone and we watched it  
over and over. We knew

all the songs, every dance move.  
We re-enacted them on the front porch,  
using a broom as a guitar, a hairbrush  
as a microphone. We were amazed  
that someone could sing in Spanish  
and sound cool, none of the warbling ballads  
or cheesy corridos heavy on the accordion  
that we knew from our abuela's records.

We girls started wearing our hair  
in high, 1950s ponytails, tied with big bows.  
Our Catholic school saddle oxfords  
were suddenly stylish. The boys either  
combed their hair into pompadours  
or wanted black leather jackets  
like Bob. Now, thirty years later,  
my cousin still thinks he's Esai Morales,  
roaring around on his motorcycle,  
and I can't hear "Sleep Walk"  
without getting choked up.

*Stand and Deliver* came out  
that same year, but a math teacher  
isn't nearly as sexy, and we had to wait  
ten years for *Selena*, for Jennifer Lopez  
to come with her nalgas and spangled bras.  
(Also not an actual Mexican,  
but we'll take what we can get.)

## **On loving a fat girl**

Skininness is next to godliness,  
or so say medieval art of hollow-cheeked  
saints and all those runway models  
in angel's wings and expensive  
lingerie

Earthy is another word for fat,  
a back-handed compliment  
as all words that try to be fat-positive are

Gluttony a sin  
Sensual pleasures a sin  
Loving this world a sin

We're supposed to ascend, lighter than air,  
to the one beyond  
and the robes are not  
one-size-fits-all

But what if I want to stay here a while?  
What if I want to forego  
the land of milk and honey,  
preferring instead chocolate and wine?

What if a single God in His single heaven  
is not large enough to contain us all?  
What if some of us were meant  
for pantheons and oh-so forgiving togas?  
What if your shame-and-guilt God  
has no place in my big fat world?

Fat girl, you  
are a magnificent mountain that I want to scale:  
the higher the peaks, the lush the valleys.  
You are a sacred grove the gods have smiled on.

There is a body under this robe,  
built for more than suffering and motherhood.  
There is more than one way to love.  
There is more than one way to love the divine.

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *All three of these poems come from a very personal place. “All the West Side Girls Love Lou Diamond Phillips” was inspired by my actual experiences growing up—my mother is Mexican, my father is German; both are first-generation Americans. I was mainly raised by my mother and her family. In the 80s, there really wasn’t much in the way of Latinx representation on TV or in films. Representation has become a big subject recently—who it affects and why it matters. When the movie, La Bamba, came out, it was such a huge deal to us, and not just because Ritchie Valens was a famous musician. It was because it showed the day-to-day life of a Mexican family—rolling tortillas, picking fruit, a brother just out of prison. I wanted to share this experience, so people can see how meaningful it is to see people who look like you on screen, especially for kids. Every word of that poem is absolutely true.*

*“Virtual Cloister” came from a place of sheer frustration. Any woman with any sort of Internet presence will tell you that we get creeped on by random guys on the regular—there’s a reason the phrase “sliding into DMs” exists. So that’s not really new, but I’ve had several particularly bad experiences lately with men who strike up a conversation and act friendly at first. Then they get skeezy, or demanding, or both, and that can only too easily become abusive. It’s so bad, I’ve actually disabled the inbox on my author page on Facebook and muted all DMs on Twitter and Instagram. I don’t know if it’s quarantine, like everyone’s a bit crazy from too much isolation or what, but seriously, I’ve had six guys in the past month or so who started out nice, then got very hostile when they felt I wasn’t paying enough attention to them. I’m like, who are you people? We don’t really know each other. Even if I did, why do you think anyone owes you their attention? And would you treat another man this way? I think not. I tried to season the piece with a bit of humor, which, in retrospect, just shows how a woman in this society is conditioned to downplay criticism of men, even in our art.*

*“On loving a fat girl” sprung from a conversation I had with a fellow Latina about weight and white beauty standards. All my adult life, I have struggled with my weight due to chronic health problems and medication. I was on a medication recently that caused me to put on 16 pounds in three months that I really couldn’t afford. (Who can?) And, yes, I do eat right and work out—in fact, since quarantine, I’ve really stepped it up, incorporating body weight training into my routine. But the weight just doesn’t come off. It’s all very frustrating. The funny thing is, as a bisexual woman, I have often been attracted to plus-sized women, so I don’t know why I hold myself to this standard that I don’t particularly find attractive in others. My friend helped me see that you have to find and claim your own beauty—self-worth is not something someone can give to you, not even those that you love. She*

*also helped me to see that worrying about what I look like clutters the mind, takes up valuable intellectual and emotional real estate that could be put to more productive uses. Also, there's no prize for being thin. My fat body can do all the things that my skinny body could do. Fat isn't inherently ugly, and it doesn't have to be a limitation. It was truly a life-altering conversation for me. This poem is what I hope to be the first of many exploring that.*

*Overall, I don't know that I have a consistent style, though these poems are reflective of what I think of as my conversational poems. They are purely my voice, conveyed as if I were speaking directly to you. (I have other styles that imitate other, better poets.) I am also a fiction writer, so I am also very comfortable working with narrative. My odd, biracial heritage was a huge influence on me, growing up in a bilingual family. My mother's family was quite poor, and my father's family was wealthy, so that also had a profound influence on my worldview. My German grandfather didn't speak English when he came*

*to this country, but he gave up his native tongue. He did not identify as German, or as an immigrant. I didn't even know he spoke German until after he died—but he was a successful business owner. My Mexican family never gave up their Spanish and did not achieve that sort of prosperity. I think this shows a lot about how this country insists on assimilation. As a result, code switching came to me as naturally as breathing. I am a linguistic chameleon, changing the diction to fit the message. So I read and write poetry because language is everything—what language to use and when to use it for the maximum desired effect. To quote Joseph Brodsky, “For a writer, only one form of patriotism exists: his attitude towards language.”*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Lauren Scharhag is the author of fourteen books, including *Requiem for a Robot Dog* (Cajun Mutt Press) and *Languages, First and Last* (Cyberwit Press). Her work has appeared in over 100 literary venues around the world. Recent honors include the Seamus Burns Creative Writing Prize, two Best of the Net nominations, and acceptance into the 2021 Antarctic Poetry Exhibition. She lives in Kansas City, MO. To learn more about her work, visit: [www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com](http://www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com)

