POETRY

Reducing the focus/Après Rimbaud

by Leah Soeiro Nentis



"Facing It Together" by Jack Bordnick

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Once, if I remember well, her kisses broke the zits into pus on my cheek
as she bent over to kiss me.

If I remember correctly I sat my mother on my knee —
a tiny, cinnamon roll of a mother — I squished her little pink cheek
and said
I am sick of your touch.

If I remember incorrectly — as best I can —
I said I loved her once when the sun broke through the ripples in the water
bringing patches of grass out of it.

We were conned by our ancestry;

disrupted by swan couples, and ferry boats and the wind
fattening and reducing the focus,
(Bringing ideas from place to place only to forbid them later.)
There, I said I could stand her touch; her breath even.

Let them set up camp on the shores of a world forgetting itself.
(I am forgetting myself between the sentences and the unsaid)
The sand. O the sand
where she dug me out
on the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea
where her father buried me
one yellow plastic scoop-full at a time.

We are a small family,
(a hymn we sing)
our hands
on top of
each other
like
stacked shells.
We are a small family.

Our roots upturned, I held my honest palms up
or everyone to see
For everyone to see
On the ferry trips out of her memory.

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If I remember this way (and not another)
Y equals Z
and I was made from
the potatoes, the veal, the carrot,
the brick-wine she refused to drink.

I was made from her
pelvis contracting, his control faltering;
the spillage and sewage of
the things they didn’t say to each other.

and although Y
equals Z
there is no point
beyond the infinite crossings
of this ferry into the next.

Yet I’ve landed in the arms of a man whose lineage can be spread
like a thread envelops and adds height to a border.
They played that game in England, you know,
even before they were born.

They had steamships
— but before —
they had raven balls
made heavy by conviction;
a hatred I can only dream of

when he fucks me against the wall
as though trying to make tapestry
out of my breasts, my sex, my cheek;
a hatred that, to me,
only *looks* like shame.

And when my nipples prickle up against the wall, when he turns me round again,
I resist the urge to spread my fingers;
evening out my surfaces
with my hot, sweaty palms.

One evening, as memory laid flat like a wood tick on its back,
I picked her up,

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the rolls coming undone,
the cinnamon sticky and
true on my fingers.

I sat my mother on my knee,
closed my eyes,
and let her touch me.

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