

THE POETIC FRONT VOL. 4 (2011)

MEMORY CARDS: WOLSAK SERIES

July, 2010

Susan M. Schultz

Behold one orphan. Radhika's blue jacket (pocket sewn inside out), white sleeveless shirt, broken sandals. *For every source that says orphans are the end of a sentence sitting alone at the top of a column there is another source that calls it a widow.* A couple came out of the plane; she clutched a teddy bear and he clutched her. They sat a while, then wandered toward baggage claim. She lost her stepbrother; the reader lost his place. Those who fall from mountains leave widows and orphans. Her sister remembers a drowning. He tries to sell me my unclaimed assets, promises to keep calling, can't pronounce my street or town. "I'm in Philly, and we've got Schuylkill." *No matter what we call them these widowed and orphaned bits of text can make our stories harder to read and our layouts look unbalanced.* Given a prompt (snapshot, story), the child remembers something. A teeter-totter sign marks the playground where there are no teeter-totters. She met a young woman in a village who might have been their birth mother. A *For Sale* sign sits atop the lava near the burning trees.

--19 July 2010

Compassion is largely exile. Went down to the ships. Went down to Laupāhoehoe. She was clearly manic, call and self-response a loop: cancer, local, Hawaiian, birth-father, Punahou. Punalu`u turtles, runway of black feathered sand to blue launch. When I drive, I think of pelicans. All poets feel/are disappointed, but most express it obliquely. A single boat pushes back against the current, cork bobbing in a blue liquor never wrought. It lives inside the word. Pass. Ion. To compare is to lose it. She noticed the dead mouse on the road, the nursing foal. (His photograph was removed for inappropriate content.) Compassion is largely an isle, nursed by ocean. Its boundaries are liquid. Too big to fail. They come pushing their carts down Kahekili, stopping by the bridge to drink. The unemployed are too lazy to look for work. A little boy in orange points away from my window frame. It's not a bad climate in which to be homeless.

--July 20, 2010

Let us finish each other's songs. She chants the Kumulipo in the back seat. How do you read the bumpersticker "Bloodlines"? *You are not my mother!* Sight memory, muscle memory. My mother has forgotten how to walk. Her throat forgets to swallow. Parse the word. *For:* forward, fortunate, fortuitous, not against, but with. *Get:* claim, hold, beget. If my mother forgets me, am I misbegotten? *Mother is a job*, he tells her; *it's the person who takes you to school, who makes sure you're safe.* At day's end, she gets you back.

--July 21, 2010

“toward my grave I have traveled but two hours” She died as the priest uttered the word “Christ.” He got the call on his cell phone, the one that made a joyful pulse in our living room. *These sounds will be heard as noise.* She turns on music between bird calls, as there's too much space. (Sorry, John Cage.) The plan is in minutes. We buy them in blocks of 1000, count them down by grocery lists and practices. He wanted to go to the better place, then realized he still had baseball. Squatters are obstacles to resorts. There ought to be a constitutional right to oblivion. Those who disappear inside their lives are suspect. Her sense of direction is precisely opposite of true. Those who die shall not be forgotten by the internet. Walmart moved the bones to refrigeration, then returned to construction. This is as true of my daughter as of any politician. The state shall manage the cultural park, lest its residents do something illegal. *Extra ambient sounds, the rustling of your clothes.* Guam keeps coming up in conversation: his son a Chamorro activist, the priest teacher to a poet friend's father. Repeated complaints about F-18s flying over Kāne`ohe between 12 and 2 a.m. *I wish they flew over me; I'd cheer all night and all day.* Feathered black sand, where turtles doze. *If we want people to take us seriously, we shouldn't dress in 14th century smocks.*

--July 23, 2010 (for Father Rob)

Is as it is last: Saturday morning call. What are you doing, mom? Listening to you. I hear you fell and hurt your elbow. No, I'm fine. (She coughs.) (She coughs again.) I'm fine (in a high pitched wail, this time). The boy plays old Atari games: I love the classics!. Simulated on a new machine. He's experiencing his father's nostalgia. His inner/outer child. My mother has forgotten her own body's hurt. But it's the same code. I hang up: a familiar sense of blank. White, a mountain in the Alps. Too much to see, we kept on walking, our heads down. The aesthetic moves seem unnecessary to the content. I can see the lines break even in prose. Is last cannot. Last days, when the elastic trips and there is no give except in for-.

--July 24, 2010

Love hinders death. There, I found it. Compass sheathed & knowing. Lost in the wilderness, he builds a fire for cameras, his bandanna still starched. *She's ok, just watching TV. Yes, she's had the cough; they're giving her something for it.* Grief's litmus, an attending to. Find a distant landmark and walk toward it. Baby turtles put back in the Gulf, despite the oil. He picked up ritual oils before leaving for the hospital. She punned on "habit," then declared them "the lowest form of humor." Deep plumes *are* linked to this spill (we lack a word for what it is). He fells a tree, eats the sap, lights a fire: no snow to douse it. It's been more than 40 days in this desert, more than 40 weeks. Lucidity is not an option. Push 211 for Country Lane, then talk to a voice you fail to recognize. *La plume de ma tante.*

--July 25, 2010

Memory as we have clung to it can be newly conceived. Since dawn, the clank of bottles-to-be-recycled. Duch sentenced to 19 years in prison; “he’s the only human, the others are monsters.” *The losses are the ones that stick, yes.* He began to carry a photograph in his pocket. Their first conversation was banal. Not that mass murder isn’t also. Archival urban mastery masks rural forgetting. The photograph a prosthetic. According to the *pegword* system, 1 is a bun, 2 is a shoe, 3 is a tree. *Did you notice that lefty sites get the spam shoe ads, as if we’re all sh*e fetishists?* Her broken sandals, his tiny shorts. How Disney reaches an orphanage in Cambodia. *One simply needs to link each item in the sequence to each of the pegwords, by making a particularly evocative and memorable association.* In the first photograph his water glass is two-thirds empty. Someone else trapped them in their frames. In the second he is holding his glasses out. *I think it’s morally irresponsible and intellectually lazy if we simply brand people like this as monsters.* The artist chose photographs according to their place in her design; those she discarded were doubly done in. He came in second in the country in mathematics. There are thousands of pairs of eyes at Tuol Sleng. *It was a trial by camera.*

--July 26, 2010

Who makes / in one location what / is meant for another? Slash in the wrong place, false enjambment. Stand beneath a door jamb during an earthquake. What / is is such. Line break, empire. (He prefers the blurry associations of poetry sometimes.) It may be blank, but it's a fence, not mended by print's odd stitch. Cold pasty or pastiche, dreads or pieds-noir. Hemistich maneuver, the boys in camouflage fire cap guns at 7 a.m. When the child is called a fucking haole she needs to recognize the long historical context of the term. Self-portraits in a context mirror cannot appease every viewer, even if mirrors do run backwards. A boy was killed seconds from home, seconds / from home. Beautiful fingers of lava grasped the carpenter's house in Kalapana. God bless America, whatever it is.

--July 27, 2010

We corner language no more than love. A corner is all lateral moves toward the pivot, shift. Says “did not” for “nevah.” He took one photograph a day until frame melted into story. She asked her son if he'd opened *da stoah*. Kāne`ohe, the Bronx. From his car seat, he said only dis and dat and deet. *You turn the corner using a nutmeg.* Moving from one language to another requires a pony. The donkey/zebra hybrid has stripes on its legs only. My on-line dictionary always begins from “squamous.” Says “New England” is a synonym for “quiet.” *And in that corner.* One wonders when rings developed corners, or when my corner developed an antipathy for yours. *Good times are just.* She heard Louis Armstrong music in Brighton. No one's got the corner on that. But this begs the question of the predicate, the sentence's back corner. *Love is a feeling that wikiHow can describe and attempt to assist,* but be sure to heed their warnings about childhood fantasies and on letting go.

--July 28, 2010

Some / depth of mercy. This is just to say I've not plumbed the mystery. My daughter eats orange food: carrots, melons, tangerines. Ubiquitous chickens rake leaves with their beaks, scatter. Matter is the issue; matter, the muse. Mine has only the depth I remember for her. *It's not what they could do, but what they still can.* De Kooning's ribbons. She's forgotten the dream, the one about a river of dead construction workers, her mentor lying on an inflatable raft, umbrella drink at hand. And I can't recall Cezanne. He did not return from his Kāne`ohe walk. *A border or a limit; a coming back.* Typos might be the after-lives of words. *Pedestrian crossing* at Diamond Head (where some thought olivine was diamond). There's a graveyard for hats below the look-out. She was swimming in that river. He was hit by a car driven by a young woman leaving the Shell station. On his final syllabus, a directive to "Use the Angel Course Management tool." *Will we cross the tiger stream with laughter?*

--July 30, 2010

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Each of these memory cards begins from a sentence or a phrase from Lissa Wolsak's *Squeezed Light: Collected Poems 1994-2005* (Station Hill, 2010).