



Introduction

Transformational change is in the works. Always. Forever.

What actions do you take each day,
or not take, each day,
to shape that change?

As, this July, *Quelle Presse* begins a second year of chapbook production, 17 writers contribute work from their current vantage points across the United States. You'll see motifs of generational struggle, people doing the work to pay attention to our own needs, the needs of our loved ones, the needs of our community and our world. You'll notice grandparents, parents, children, and what they mean to us; we, who are building on the models left to us, remaking our models as we learn to expand our circle of attentive care.

On May 20, 2020, Annie Rachele Lanzillotto gave me an assignment to write a psalm. This issue of *Quelle Presse* is dedicated to Annie for the work she has done to join this group of writers. Here is that psalm:

May we live to protect each other in our hammocks, on our journeys.
May our tumultuous waves of thought find genial, comprehending harbors.
May an unspeakable sorority of security,
 an infinite fraternity of feeling,
 be in us on account of mutual understanding.
May we live to see, each day that dawns, the light that fills the world.
May we leave the world with more satisfaction for having known others in it.

May each of you, readers, seize the opportunities you have to mold a world of attention, justice, and hard fought peace. Each day by day.

— Rachel Mckeen, Founding Editor, *Quelle Presse*

Essay by Julija Šukys

A Telling Name

I've been reading long-ago letters from my family's dead. I delight in their terms of endearment, trace the gestures of their handwriting, and sway to the rhythms of their old village dialects. Visiting with my ghosts helps me step out of time and away from the pandemic, at least for a while. Call it a coping mechanism.

"The tumor has come through the skin now," the cancer specialist told me by phone from Toronto. He called this morning, as promised. "It's time for the mastectomy," he said.

In the days before the virus outbreak had begun in earnest, the doctor and I had weighed the costs and benefits of surgery: my mother is elderly, paralyzed after decades of degenerative illness, and has already beaten cancer once. Given her age and frailty, we decided to put it off for as long as possible. Chemo and radiation would be out of the question in her case. "What's more, given her state, she might never come off a respirator," the doctor said quietly.

A mere week after this conversation, the virus began its tear through the care facility that has served as my mother's home for over a decade. It came suddenly and strong. Before long, the Covid had caught my mother. I walked around for days in a fog of tears and anticipatory grief, reeling between the two diagnoses – cancer and Covid, Covid and cancer – both apparent death sentences. "Save your mourning until you need it," my husband said gently. "She's alive now."

Against all odds, my mother has come through the infection. It lasted around 8 weeks. Even her nurse called it a miracle.

The home sends a virus update by email each day. Every morning with my coffee I open the file and study the columns: "Positive," "Negative," "Deaths," "Resolved." Today, as I read, I do a quick tally. The virus has now killed 37 people in the building. 80 active cases of Covid-19 remain. Last week, the total of in the "Resolved" column went up by one, that is, by my mother's survival. Call it a reprieve.

The cancer specialist's Ethiopian name, I've surmised, means "Servant of Christ." Even being as bad a Catholic as I am, I nevertheless find comfort in this "telling name" (*sprechender Name*), so apt for a doctor brimming with compassion and shimmering intelligence. When I filled him in on my mother's infection, recovery, and the home's continued lockdown, he changed his plan for surgery. "The virus is unpredictable," he said. "We don't know what damage it has done to your mother's lungs. We don't know if she can be re-infected."

So, again, we wait. We wait for the virus to finish its rampage. For my mother's body to strengthen itself. To see if it will prove its immunity.

After the call, I put the family letters away. The virus has pulled me back into time. I feel the march of every minute as I calculate how long I will need to travel and self-quarantine to be at my mother's side, should the mastectomy become her ferry to the ghosts.

Poem by Rachel McKeen

6 June 2020

for Cesar, friend of Bernardo Palacios-Carbajal

I have no words blown
away outside my house
who we are
 helicopters, wind gushing
gusting how did they get the blood
out of the parking lot
who they are
standing before unmarked tanks
beige, the color of fear
he said, to describe houses
a church once built
words like blood just
what comes out
 a siren
wail, we say
I, mistaken, claim to hear
beyond the wind gasping for

breathe

come into my house
sayeth, sayeth
only now I remember
reaching out our hands
traditionally
blue cross tattooed below right eye
what does it mean
to touch each other?

White On White

I am anti-racist.
I am anti-privileged.
What's mine isn't mine.
My skin is pink.

I became pink
In 1963 when I was born blue
But the Italian doctor curled his pinky
Between the double wrapped umbilicus and my neck
I became pink
When I breathed a block of Bronx air for the first time
I turned pink in 1963

I wasn't too pink
In 1919 when Grandma arrived from the heel of the boot
To Massachusetts amidst protests for Sacco and Vanzetti
I wasn't too pink in 1919

I wasn't too pink
In 1927 when they pulled the switch
Putting out the lights of the souls
Of my *paesan'*
 the *Torremaggiorese* Sacco
 the *Villafalletesi* Vanzetti *on*
I wasn't too pink in 1927

I wasn't too pink
In 1891 when eleven Sicilians were lynched in New Orleans
After being acquitted for murder.
The mob of whites didn't see Sicilians as pink
I wasn't too pink in 1891

I am pink
In 1968 in Kindergarten when MLK is shot
I don't remember any nuns blinking
Just a regular spring day practicing my ABC's
I am pink in 1968

I am pink
In 1972 on Saint Raymond's Avenue
The neighborhood boys teach me
How to hurl small branches from the maple tree
Like spears through the spokes of the bicycle wheels
Of the first Puerto Rican boy in the neighborhood
Get this through your head
The boy is brown
You are pink
I am taught to throw the branch ahead of his bicycle
Consider speed, motion, direction
The physics of "otherism"
I am pink with excellent aim
I am pink in 1972

I am pink
In 1980 when I paint the sign "Bomb Iran"
On forty feet of cheerleader paper
And hang it on the overpass with a buddy
Outside our high school
I am pink in 1980

We were no color but the blood we bled on the white floor
In 1981 when we were roommates at Sloan-Kettering
We were the same
in 1981
And that was the best Christmas I ever had
Our blood falling together on the shiny white floor.

I am pink
In 1986 when my black girlfriend
teaches me to dance and fuck
I am pink on the dance floor and in the bedroom in 1986

I am pink
In Egypt in 1985
Sucking sugar cane in Luxor
Being asked for baksheesh
I am pink in 1985

I am pink in 2000
In a muddy alley in Addis Abbaba
Where the kids just want to touch me out of curiosity
I am pink in 2000

I am pink
In New York City in 2014 when a cop pulls me over
Shines his flashlight around the front and back seats of my car:
"I'm not worried about anything here."
Pinkness is a get-out-of-jail-free card
Pink. I am pink. Pink. Pink.
Most of my family woulda been dead many times over
if we weren't so goddamn pink
I am pink in 2014

I am pink
In 1972 when my mother escapes from my father
My uncle puts a thousand bucks under the table
So my mother and I can get an apartment
When they accept us into the apartment complex
Mom and I are pink and pretty in 1972

I am pink
In 2020 when I watch
The revolution through a Twitter feed
Not choke on tear gas and flash bombs
I am pink when I don't run into the streets
With a sign that says:
"George, I am your mother.
Your mother hears you.
Come to me George."

I am pink in 2020

I am pinkest
On Memorial Day 2020
When it is the twisted devil Chauvin
Whose lack of facial expression I know so well
I am pink still
As I recognize George Floyd's breath breath breath
I am pinkest in 2020

In 2020 all we heard about was ventilators

The need for hundreds of thousands of ventilators worldwide
Until Floyd's trachea got crushed by a white kneecap
Where was George Floyd's ventilator?

Many people have fought
To keep my pink body alive and breathing
High class medications, emergency interventions
Hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills
From the first breath my body didn't take
I never took a bullet for nobody
In this life time
That's not true
There's different kinds of bullets after all
Name them

I am pink right now eating eggs and toast
Pink fingers tapping the keyboard to
Send out this poem to a pink editor

O that we could all be blind
All be blind
Like we will be
Years after we are dead
When we are all
White
Bones
Ash
Electrons
Sweet water soul
Runs through us all

To not recognize others as "other"
was the goal
of every prophet
saint, seer
and soul