

Group Cnts



CRITIC'S REVIEW OF A LEADING ROLE

Death is not the villain we supposed,
nor is it sinister or strange. Our acts
could not go on without it. Plays are closed
by deconstruction, change, the emptied facts,
not death. As scenes run down, each line detracts.
No playwright can revive a failing script.
There are no refills once the wine is sipped.

The eager booking agents call no more.
The crowd is gone, few fans are buying seats,
and vacant rows preclude another encore.
You think-- perhaps if you recite some Keats
or polish up some old gymnastic feats
you might entice them back-- a sold-out house
instead of playing to a backstage mouse.

Co-starred with death, our silent partnership,
the ancient contract still inviolate,
is why the drama works. It gives us grip
and vital drive. Too soon the years deflate
dynamic roles. Accumulated weight
of bumbled lines, bad entrances, missed cues increase the costs and raise the
yearly dues.

Consider how foreverness allots
a strung-out tedium of now and here
while grinding down our once-important plots.
The wise Director lets no sonneteer
recite so long he tries to commandeer
eternity and turn it to his will.
The denouement requires unearthly skill.

Retiring from the mortal stage at last
we change and put on makeup so unique
no actor could have worn it in the past,
nor bowed and raised so radiant a cheek.
We're given living words of truth to speak.
Each player's voice resolves a major chord.
Each tongue transmits the music of the Lord.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
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20 lines

PRETENDIN'

Today I pushed imagination's wheel--
one full circle, one whole turn around.
My pockets bulge with new things I can feel--
a wand, and maybe dragon seeds I found.

A bug who wears black polka dots on red
tells stories to a toad with googly eyes.
What Mother calls "dust bunnies" 'neath the bed
are really fuzzy slippers, fairy size.

Those ancient dinosaurs that disappeared
are hiding in the woods behind my house.
Their spikes stick up above the trees. It's weird--
to them I seem no bigger than a mouse.

Sometimes I shrink and float away in sky.
It's big up there, I see the birds up close.
A robin let me hitch a ride and fly!
She gave me half her worm---ew-w! what a dose!

But best of all I learned it's fun to dream up
the stuff that grown-ups never understand--
'cause they've forgotten how to build the steam up
in ships that sail away to Magicland.

--Glenna Holloway

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DOLPHIN SCHOOL

Our boat makes waves in deep Bahama blue.
Three dolphins join our fun. Now right on cue
They rollercoast beside us just like kids
On circus rides. Quite unimpressed with grids
Or charts, they leap and trail the water high
And splash sunlight confetti in my eye.

The crew is studying this fish that's not
A fish. They're mammals, breathing air, that's what.
Their skin looks like an inner tube all wet
And stretched out in torpedo shape to get
More speed beneath the sea. They love to play
and race with boats and spatter us with spray.

--Glenna Holloway

93 lines

LAKEFRONT PLAYERS HOST BAUDELAIRE BACKSTAGE

That's what the headline would say if the Tribune got wind of this. It would be interesting to see how they handled the story. But you won't be around long enough for an interview.

I'll be your docent tonight. Most of the cast is on strike. As a non-union member I may not exactly follow the script.

Daylight Saving Time is off now; you can come out early. The city shift is complete; workers are in place in front of screens and plates. Revelers, artists, idlers slowly claim the streets. You've come to the right spot.

The lake hasn't raised enough breeze to push away the curtain of Diesel fumes hanging over us.

It's not a smell you would know. The phallic towers of the powerful probe the high smoke, challenging low-flying angels. You can see the aura of millions of souls for miles offshore-- part light-- part heat and odor and sound.

You look tired. The great bias of a searchlight just swept across your gaunt jaw, the fixed line of your mouth. You aren't happy with the way your words sounded at the evening reading, are you? It didn't synch with the times.

But come, there's a lot to see.

This is the outback, still in sight of magnificence-- magnanimity-- magic-- maggots. The lower level is pocked with puddled reflections, shimmering with shades of lust and logic and oblique beauty. Most of the premises are muddy, wantonly shining. You almost but don't quite fit here, either. But for these hours you won't be a stranger.

The images are stronger here than nineteenth century Paris if only in size and number. The metal traffic never stops; the motorized moving from somewhere to somewhere beams through the night, never out of reach of hands that open-- caress-- point, close, make a fist. Glass clinks, machines clunk-- flash-- whine and mostly slam shut on your money. Seconds roll off the timers on pizza ovens, vats of grease sound like rain, blinking neon viscera surround the found-art collage-- red circles of beef, translucent blocks of frozen fish, pyramids

of potatoes. The man sleeping in the cardboard box
is waiting to eat from Chicago's morning garbage.

Your notebook is full. But tell me how you did it,
how you bent the edgy shards of yourself
inside the margins of dodecasyllable and rhymes
you called "lanterns that light the pathway
of the idea." Oh, you did it with classic ease
and grace but your light came from rage and passion,
no gilded finials needed. Did you impose
the stricture on yourself as misplaced discipline--
or did you bestow a toady's nod
to literary fashion? I suspect
you of masochistic joy in tight seams
and chafing collar as you bowed to the icon
of respectability on behalf of your art.
You were like the structure on the corner there--
facade of stately brick, orderly stairs and balustrades--
a brothel. You were the rebel, the damned, the genius,
yet you matched your step to the common cadence
of the crowd. Then you made living an insult
to your life. There are those who can't forgive you.

And that's why you're here, isn't it? You know about
the freedom that could have been your own.
You could have mastered the time that was yours,
crimped your habits and loosed your lines.
You could have transformed vers libre
into a cracking whip. You could have paced it,
measured it with subtle drums and polyrhythms
no one had heard before, you could have ground arrogance
in the grit of consonance without curbs,
you could have slanted assonance away from ignorance
and used it like a saber. Or angled abutted words
new ways to be blessed by the tongues
of your countrymen and mine, then and now.
Once proving yourself at the feet of tradition,
you could have stood and carved your name
on a pedestal higher than hers. The age and the man
came together only briefly and parted unfulfilled.

The hour before dawn grows softer
before the chuffing trucks start gathering to disgorge.
Nothing is blossoming wicked and wild in cans and pots
on the cracked stoops, only cold-black geraniums,
forgotten. A night-blooming cereus opens whitely
on a glassed porch, rarest of the rare,
leaking its perfume to the sidewalk.

Rising sun is unenthusiastic, stingy with its warmth.
This dry ivory skull feels smooth and cool
between my palms. Alas, poor Baudelaire.
No one knew him well. Tomorrow-- maybe not at all.

Oh, you did it with classic grace but your light
came from rage and passion, not limned thoughts
with flickering finials. Did you impose strictures
on your work as misplaced discipline-- or did you
bestow a toady's nod to literary fashion?
I suspect you of masochistic joy in tight seams
and chafing collar while bowing, praying secretly
to the icon of respectability and mother.

You were like that structure on the corner there--
facade of meticulous brick, swept stairs
and polished balustrades--a brothel. You were
the rebel, the damned, the genius--
slippering your en garde stance to carpeted cadence
while insulting your life with your living.
There are those who still can't forgive you.
Maybe less for corsetry than the need to conform
unerringly in the last place you should have
yielded to that need. Letting it surface
and harden like basalt jailing jewels,
a curse for translators turning ruby to garnet.

And that's why you're here, isn't it? The wolf wishing
he had transcended the trap. You know the freedom
you could have owned. The control you could have seized
of the circus horse bobbing to a thumping band.
You could have ridden the age, cinched your habits,
loosed your lines and commanded vers libre
like a cracking whip. You could have paced it, shaped it
with subtle drums and polyrhythms never heard before.

Having lifted the lid off watered stew,
having seasoned it rich and filling, you could have
served it on ground arrogance, the grit of consonance
without curbs. You could have slanted assonance
away from ignorance and released it
like an epee's flash. After a morning nod at tradition,
you could have signed your name higher than hers.
You could have grown old.
If not by outwitting infected blood, in perfected bone
turned steel. The time and the man, irresistible
lovers, reeled apart not quite consummated.

But my jeremiad runs rigid as your pentametrics,
end-tied. Now before chuffing trucks gather to disgorge
at sun-up, nothing is blossoming wicked and wild
in cans and pots on cracked stoops,
only cold-black geraniums, forgotten.
A night-blooming cereus opens, ghostly on a glassed porch,
rarest of the rare, leaking its perfume to the gutter.

False dawn touches, holds in its palms the white curve
of petals like a skull, predicting the final metaphor,
begging me to borrow from Avon's bard for amusement,
for lack of good-bye words.

All right: Alas, poor Baudelaire.

No one knew him well. Tomorrow-- maybe not at all

LIONESS
(*Felis leo*)

Your mate abdicates the role. You rule.
You don't need that paling tan
pooling with shade in the high weeds
of your stealth, not even out on the wadi
or on wide-open veldt gnawed bald
by waves of wildebeest.
You could pose bold as scarlet
in any clearing; you could pause
at the water hole to cool bright insolence
glowing orange as monarch wings.
Your span doesn't spin on daily choices
between locusts in the nerve center
and grassfire in the throat,
doesn't wheel on trembling limbs
bearing fear and thirst.

You don't need camouflage to raid the night,
parting zebra stripes, stropping your fangs
on kudu bone. You are Zeus's lightning,
bane of the grazers, an exercise in dominion
for your subjects never to forget their ranks
in the realm. You are Artemis, eyes
like arrows for piercing hyena or spotted cat.
Your coat of arms should iridesce
with pride colors: gold, silver, royal purple
should radiate rampant where you prey.

And when at last you lie down with the lamb,
do it in spectral splendor.

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Critic's Review
of Leading Rule
(death)
Rhyming the Reason
Defying Breakers
Keats' ode
(First Things)

"...Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu..."
--John Keats, Ode on Melancholy

DEFYING THE BREAKERS

The truth, two-sided wave of grief
and joy, I intimately know.
One half conceals a stealthy thief.

The other bears elation's sheaf
of blessings which I store to show
the happy opposite of grief.

I focus on the greening leaf
instead of raked-up piles of woe
whose depths conceal a stealthy thief.

Survival of a coral reef
attests to standing in the flow
of truth, one half, a wave of grief.

I hold to this, however brief
the gladness, always turned to go.
The depths conceal a stealthy thief.

With buoyed cheer my small craft's chief,
I sail across the undertow
of truth, two-sided wave of grief
and joy-- one half a stealthy thief.

And I will shelter in my soul's belief.

--Glenna Holloway

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RHYMING THE REASON

Some folks acknowledge God
with nothing but a nod.

Some bypass holy laws
and shrug at mortal flaws.

Don't listen to the man
who always claims he can
worship under oak or birch
better than he can in church

unless he sits beneath the trees,
an open Bible on his knees.

--Glenna Holloway

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KIDS

KIDS

A GOOD ENDING

The day was filled with robin trills,
The kids were out for fun.
They found red rocks and flower frills
And June bugs in the sun.

A boy named Rick said, "Where's a stick,
I'm gonna kill that snake!"
Said Smitty, "Hit it with this brick,
I'll go get Mama's rake!"

But Lisa said, "No, no, please don't!
It isn't bad, just give
It room and back away, it won't
Attack us. Let it live!"

They all got on their bikes to ride.
Then Michael said, "Y'know--
Life's not for people to decide.
I'm glad we let it go."

--Glenna Holloway

Comments on the human
tongue.

St Jones
Comments
on the human
tongue

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ADVENTURE TRAIL

Today I ate an orange, saved the peel,
half white, half yellow-reddish, then I wound
my wrist with curling smell, a fruity reel
of scenes from Florida. My brother frowned.

He needs imagination, can't match sound
with colors, size, can't figure where to look
for lazy cloud-sheep grazing on the ground,
can't press the just-washed moon inside a book.

I've heard a song shaped like a shepherd's crook,
I've tasted thunder and I know it's black.
Each picture that my "play-like" camera took
was soft or hot or tickly, front and back.

His life is boring, everything's the same
as others see. It really is a shame--
his mind's a single track that seems to lack
gold knobs and circuits for the learning game.

--Glenna Holloway

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12 lines

DOLPHIN SCHOOL

Our boat makes waves in deep Bahama blue.
Three dolphins join our fun. Now right on cue
They rollercoast beside us just like kids
On circus rides. Quite unimpressed with grids
Or charts, they leap and trail the water high
And splash sunlight confetti in my eye.

The crew is studying this fish that's not
A fish. They're mammals, breathing air, that's what.
Their skin looks like an inner tube all wet
And stretched out in torpedo shape to get
More speed beneath the sea. They love to play
and race with boats and spatter us with spray.

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MAGIC MONTHS

In April I will play
With roaring lions every day.
They hide in swaying grass
To nip my toes each time I pass.
But they don't frighten me--
I'm full of vegetables, you see.
So I don't taste like meat--
For meat is what they like to eat.

In August I will crawl
With lizards on the garden wall.
They hide between the stones
And pick their teeth with beetle bones.
They slip around like spies
And blink at sun and roll their eyes.
Today one licked my hand--
His tongue got stuck, I must taste grand!

--Glenna Holloway

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LOOKING FOR BLUE

Sometimes my lady bug flies south
And dances in October's mouth.
Her brother bugs say, "No!
Too far to travel, we won't go.
Let's be red acrobats
On pony tails and lady cats."

But I don't think they will--
They'd rather polka dot the hill.
Too lazy to outspread their wings
They'll dip and sway on grapevine swings.
Pretending to be soaring high,
They'll never taste the bluest sky.

--Glenna Holloway

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I'LL TELL YOU A SECRET

You have to wear dark glasses if you want
to get a look at ghosts on Halloween.
Then they think you can't see 'em as they haunt
deserted spots owned by the witches' queen.

--Glenna Holloway

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Rondeau, 15 lines

PUSHING THE DISCOVERY WHEEL

I want to know how fire can burn
Beneath the sea, how rocks can churn,
Erupt a melted orange flow
That sets big chunks of reef aglow
Like ships aflame from stem to stern.

There's so much why and what to learn,
I touch the fronds of forest fern,
The crystal forms in flakes of snow
I want to know.

Each changing season makes me yearn,
And study hard so I can earn
New answers from the dynamo
That operates things here below
While cosmic engines pump and turn--
I want to know!

--Glenna Holloway

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24 lines

LOOKING AHEAD AND LIKING IT

Some scientist is on TV--
A lecture called "Tomorrow's Key."
The speaker, with compelling style,
Confronts new eras with a smile.
(So many experts deal in doom;
The future offers little room
For optimism, some folks say.)
But this one sees a dawning day:

"Sun power, and the molten core
Of earth, sea waves-- it takes no more
Than these to furnish all our needs
Without pollution, waste. This leads
To weather mastery, and then
New streams and forests rise again."

Expressing hope with all his might,
Another expert says he's right:
"Humanity will share a plan
Affecting time beyond our span.
Disease is conquered, even age,
And best of all, man's inborn rage.
At last, he should possess the grace
To take his knowledge into space."

I'm not impressed with Ph.Ds,
But these are great hypotheses!

--Glenna Holloway