My Mother Pieced Quilts

By Teresa Palomo Acosta

they were just meant as covers

in winters

as weapons

against pounding january winds

but it was just that every morning I awoke to these

october ripened canvases

passed my hand across their cloth faces

and began to wonder how you pieced

all these together

these strips of gentle communion cotton and flannel

nightgowns

wedding organdies

dime-store velvets

how you shaped patterns square and oblong and round

positioned

balanced

then cemented them

with your thread

a steel needle

a thimble

how the thread darted in and out

galloping along the frayed edges, tucking them in

as you did us at night

oh how you stretched and turned and re-arranged

your michigan spring faded curtain pieces

my father's santa fe work shirt

the summer denims, the tweed of fall

in the evening you sat at your canvas

—our cracked linoleum floor the drawing board

me lounging on your arm

and you staking out the plan:

whether to put the lilac purple of easter against the

red plaid of winter-going-into-spring

whether to mix a yellow with blue and white and paint

the corpus christi noon when my father held your hand

whether to shape a five-point star from the

somber black silk you wore to grandmother's funeral

you were the river current

carrying the roaring notes

forming them into pictures of a little boy reclining

a swallow flying

you were the caravan master at the reins

driving your thread needle artillery across the

mosaic cloth bridges

delivering yourself in separate testimonies

oh mother you plunged me sobbing and laughing

into our past

into the river crossing at five

into the spinach fields

into the plainview cotton rows

into tuberculosis wards

into braids and muslin dresses

sewn hard and taut to withstand the thrashings of

twenty-five years

stretched out they lay

armed/ready/shouting/celebrating

knotted with love

the quilts sing on

Questions:

What might have inspired Acosta to write this poem? What can the reader infer about the speaker’s relationship with her mother? Refer to specific evidence from the poem in your answer.

What is the original purpose of these quilts? Why does the speaker find deeper meaning imbued in them? Explain, in your own words, why the quilts are important to the speaker’s understanding of her mother.

The speaker describes her mother’s quilts as “october ripened canvases” in the sixth line of the poem. What does this mean? In your own words, interpret this figure of speech and its meaning.

Quick Write: Please write a full paraph (5-7 sentences) on the following prompt. You will need to include textual evidence to support your answer:

Acosta uses images of weaponry or battle at several different points in the poem. Why? What place does this kind of language have in a poem about the speaker’s mother? In a well developed paragrpah, explain how this imagery relates to the poem’s meaning. Be sure to refer to specific examples from the poem to support your response.

\*You may use the space below to write your answer.