

Claire Barbetti

The Stoning

Another stone

The x in *voix* is silent as a t or an s at the end also would be. Slugs of letters. Little rocks. Could silence be any harder? Does the silence of those letters anticipate the erasure of sin at the final becoming? To speak it, lips begin pursed, then relax, open to release or receive in seeing. But the word so easily becomes *veut* in a sleight-of-hand of the mouth. Wanting tightens, teeth bite the inner cheek, the muscles' fingers in their own flesh tense to suck.

We want to, want to, will

Will you throw stones at her head? Or place them gently at her feet?

They will bury my body up to my throat in sand and hurl rocks at my head until the tears and brains mingle

Amina Lawal, your female name is the first stone thrown at you. In fables, poems, registers, law. There is a page in a book where writing has undone what is written. At the elders' inquisition, a man, nothing more than a word, bent down to the ground, wrote in the dust twice and saved the adulteress. Here I can write the privilege of fictions to steal your body out of breeding sands. That you were stolen from your own sweat and terror. You awakened marvelously unclothed, kept and unkept, not knowing where you were, and asked if this was love.

Dogs will tear my body apart, I know, or stones in eyes will pelt me

Above the sea and the sound, there is a cliff, not before the Pacific, not before the Mediterranean, or Atlantic, Bering, Indian. Merely above the blue-green, and the land rumbles; I know my place there, wordless. Where the ground's crust is thin and words--bones bathed in blood--are incinerated by lava flowing beneath immense stone faces, bronze copulating bodies, gravestones. And the gravestones hum the original rage between the earth and my hand's bold touch.

To let all the light in, dilation must occur. And only then can one speak

Press me between the shore's gray stones and your chest. Make my shoulder blades vie for sharpness with the granite. You, despite your hardness, will be softer to me. As a tongue between teeth.

Voix

You have eyes in your throat.

Presences Tell Us Right From Wrong

She broke her hand-mirror, but ladybugs invade the house

The red strap on her shoulder slips.

Route 488

She pulls over to the shoulder, skidding halt, fussing, rolling her brown eyes, sick of his criticism at her driving. A wheat field looks through them. Bending quietly, the stalks are blood or the sheathed marrow gray of chicken bones. *Get out and pull some for me*, she says. He yields, lays five torn plants on the backseat. Green and gold rest to braid kernels into alternating eyes that observe them as they drive home in peace.

Making-up after a few glasses of wine. Now, the lamps are all lit in the living room

No, I didn't see the boy listening at the foot of the staircase. But I believe you.

From the top of the hill, West Liberty Avenue

The sky is ink covering spilled white wine and semen. Traffic hustles headlights before its hour, beaming at me mid-street where I'm honked at, taken with the overhead panorama of battles, a light cheated: an armada sinking, or Nestor's and Andromache's walls caving in. Where clouds taper a stronghold of blue illegally remains. I'm impatient to meet the storms. The first raindrops are pearls or bullets as I run home to find martinis on the porch, already poured. The alcohol is like the half-light bleaching passing cars.

You are with me all the time and I miss you, with these olives in my glass, the double rainbow, and the rattling in my heart, a downpour.

Birds

Intractable shift, clinging odor, chemical composition of speech leaving finger marks on their wings by our cradling. Baby birds are full of fear from what we think is right for them. You, a man in my dreams, are a bird yourself. My touch on your breast, a threat. My limbs are shaking too. I cry; you have dissolved. Yet birds are noisy throughout the day, untouched.

Greenbrier County. At her urging to read the landmark, he interrupted the drive home, stopping beside a marsh of full-bodied cattails. Satisfied somehow that he did it
Zona Heaster Neale appeared to her sleeping mother in 1897 and told her just how she was murdered. Belief in the soaking dreams was justified.

Auditory hallucination. Or vision

At the salt mines before the sea there is the vista I've seen before. Orange sky steams gray into aquamarine. Drying stalagmites of salt breathe a glinting sobriety. I awake to a voice speaking *Do not cry, Dear. Why are you sad when love is ever present to you?* Sitting up in my bed, I look for the escaping face. Silence. The moon's cool light casts wavering shadows of leaves over the hardwood floor. Dark, light, dark... I imagine the breeze that gently moves them. My skin feels the silver passage watching, and desires.

Working note to 'The Stoning': Letters that are silent, the silent loud sound of dreams, people who are silenced (especially women) all converge here in a meditation on the present day adjudication of Amina Lawal, a Nigerian woman sentenced to death by stoning for adultery. In the days following the first articles I read about Lawal, so many different myths and stories presented themselves, layered themselves over the newsprint I read with my morning coffee: most obviously, the story of Jezebel, but also Christ saving the adulteress from being stoned by the elders in the gospel of John, D.H. Lawrence's "The Horse Trader's Daughter," heart-pounding dreams, and the distinct image of words

literally seeing ourselves. The poem itself is an interplay of stones and voices, sight and language with condemnation and desire.

Note: Amina Lawal thankfully had her sentence overturned in 2004 and is now free. I do not doubt that the written word helped to save her life--the influx of Amnesty International letters during that time was truly amazing, as well as the press coverage.

Working note to 'Presences': Normally, we think of political law or religious law tallying our moral comportment. Codified law. Its placement is, for the most part, rigid and severe. It is blocked off in courts and tablets, numbered and itemized. I'm interested in the concept of morality, especially with the binary opposition of right and wrong, and from where it descends, the possibilities of its location. So I apply that binary structure, right and wrong, to such things as ghosts and ladybugs, grief and rainstorms to blow it up a bit, to say, hey wait, how can we think of things this way, right and wrong, it's not so easy, it's open and things outside of us keep opening it more. I want to find a morality that proceeds from the sensual, from an erotic justice.

Claire Barbetti is a student, teacher, writer, editor and mother. In 1998 she co-founded the interdisciplinary journal *Janus Head*. Currently she is an editor at Mise Publications and is working on her doctoral degree in English at Duquesne University, specializing in medieval literature and twentieth century poetics. The medieval concept of *aventure* is her passion at the moment, and seems to be requiring experiential research as well as scholarly.