



The Arc of the Moral Universe is Long and Bends Toward Conflation

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ABSTRACT

This poem was inspired by reflection on the commonalities between civilian casualties of war and those bereaved by suicide. The use of white space in the poem symbolizes the threshold encountered after the sudden death of a loved one, particularly when violence, especially self-directed violence, is involved. The speaker cannot find meaning in so much death, and movement away from the right margin, the anchor of loss, is disorienting and dissociating. The speaker of the poem is frozen the threshold, unable to flee; much like civilians in war zones, very much like those experiencing posttraumatic stress.

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He was six, blond as the dust kissing his body.

And the soldier swept his baton over the poppies beating

the memory of his brother, who was eight. All that flourishes comes with great pain.

And that boy, that boy was three, his red shirt a buoy in the rising tide.

The air raid siren loops in a shell there's still work to do the work

Is never done.

I am a cleft chin dribbled in blood.

I once read every woman adores a fascist so I become one. No, not like that.

Oh the browns and reds and blacks all blue.

Once my boy was twenty-four and out in the world for war any would do.

The oils sold and women wept not for him.

Neither the bell nor the toil took the toll except the call the caw of the raven

liminal in flight. I pull my hair out to avert your gaze. The veil is the fascist.

Oh me! Heart closing like a fist. Oh me! Wishing for no heart at all.

It is a bird of prey. I am the tongue stuck in the jaw fishing.

We are the looming long ranged heat-seeking forgotten.

I can speak and speak and speak and remain stuck stuck

Caw caw the raven reminds me—a wolf howls but I am neither lake nor forest

nor city slaked street.

And so my boy goes. And.

The grim display—his shell, my fist heart, our bloodlust—gone cold.

And on. And on. And once. Once eight. Seven.

I rejoin the weeping.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Yania Padilla Sierra is a writer, poet, educator, and suicide prevention advocate. She is a suicide loss survivor, having lost her uncle, Dr. Julio Sierra, and brother, Sgt. Walter Padilla, to PTS (posttraumatic stress).

Her literary work explores the intersection of personal and transpersonal grief. This piece was inspired by reflection on the commonalities between civilian casualties of war and those bereaved by suicide. The use of white space in the poem symbolizes the threshold encountered after the sudden death of a loved one, particularly when violence, especially self-directed violence, is involved. The speaker cannot find meaning in so much death, and movement away from the right margin, the anchor of loss, is disorienting and dissociating. The speaker of the poem is frozen the threshold, unable to flee; much like civilians in war zones, very much like those experiencing PTS.

In 2020, Yania was selected as a CantoMundo fellow as well as a Frontier Poetry Editorial fellow. She served as CantoMundo's interim program director in 2021. In 2021, she was named a National Hispanic and Latino Executive Leadership fellow. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Até Mais* (Deep Vellum), *Bacopa Literary Review*, and the AROHO anthology. Her debut novel, *Those Who Chose the Sea*, is forthcoming. She currently serves as a suicide prevention program manager for the US Army.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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