

2017 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention: Maximilian Topel

Your voice
I sense something on my skin
Tenderness
But like sand and time, you escape me
although I have more

In the window of your eyes
a view
to the sweetness of the sea
And I smile
how can it be
that until that moment
you were never announced to me
From the fine rays of light
raining onto this place
I can see

Do not leave me in peace
I have had all that is tranquility
imagined memory to please my sleep
like buds of cotton
that float on the crevices of my hands
Like revelation in the dew of the mountain
that I watch fall to the brilliance of the sun

And the mountain will continue to be power
And the green places, the sugar of life
without you

But they will have no color
Nor culture
Nor sickness
Nor necessity
And my soul will pale
to return to her natural hibernation

Animate me
in each moment my love
animate me with your eyes
that embrace my own
with the sublime flavor of your lips

without you
the hopes that I once saw living in my illusions
go blind.

I cannot recount for you
My younger days in old Havana
Ridding the guagua from the synagogue to the tailors
Where my grandfathers stitched my future

I do not remember the color of the balcony
upon whose rails Marti's Rose lay
Free from the clutch of her jailor
Blooming to completeness in the warm Cuban sun.

I do not recall how my abuela's frijoles smelled
As their scent kissed the salty sea air
Floating in from the Malecón
To refresh my hungry soul

I do not recognize the synagogue
Where in my guayabera I prayed
For peace and prosperity unto all nations
As we had in our Caribbean home

For each image I know to be a reverie
But in the absence of such dreams
Who can cultivate the white rose
The soul of our land

Arise we will as she climbs from the ashes
Burn from the hopes of an uncertain nation
Fertilized by the tears of memories imagined
And those better forgotten
We raised the bandera

I cannot recount for you
My young days in old Havana
Where with my brothers and I played
Or of my nights at the Tropicana

But her people are passion
And in passion there is no rest
For my home, my Cuba Libre
To let the old man at Dos Rios know

He does not fight alone

They pierce, like the fine edge of polished steel
But with a feral rage that fades unto me in animus
And though they cut
the blood we share is too thick to flow
It is the bond descended to bondage
Of a heart once fresh drowned in the thickness
Of the revelation written in that blood

And from there extended vacillation
For her gaze was beyond me and
Inhabited only by memories of autumnal infancy
Upon the backdrop of a lilac sea
Whose waves upon my life did never caress

But such serenity in my Ignorance to her cause
Such disdain placed in the rut of intentionalism
And derision folded my conscience, my consent
I did shamefully leave to it

But it is all that exists. And all that remains
If a frozen relation given to time
I was not charitable. Perhaps it is my own gaze that is lacking
And in anger.

And in nothingness.

There is no solace to be found

You speak from the pulpit of ignorance
With words that are not your own
With heinous hatred in your heart
With no origin, reason or conscience

You spatter in them from a disease of the mind
For intent is unknown to you
Intimacy with the truth is nothing to you
And infection spreads with your rhyme

I held you once in esteem
Out of the decency of human companionship
But it could be so.
You who deny the tree of knowledge for a richer poison

And each word slashes like the scyth
It cuts away at each man's soul
With falsehoods that ring true
Letting pathos take control

But I know you and I am not bound by you
Nor shall I ever be
I will fight you with this world's honesty
And in truth of love or as the dust of the earth
In truth alone shall I be free

an american portrait
sits hidden in the shadow above the window
a plainly fitted lace curtain
to filter light hallowing the room

freely hung she wavers not with the wind
sunk not by the burden of the oncoming storm
nor is she blanched as she watches her children in their despair

and rise and still i rise
these words here live
etched deep into its heart
come
come
you tired and poor
you wearied huddled masses
to weep in elation on the shores of this land fair

an american portrait hangs high in every heart
an unforgiving reminder of dedication
an illuminating pact with oneself and one's people
bound in the burnished leather of a nation's histories

and with bold words and brazen actions
hollowed by disregard, distain and disrepair
comes the epitaph that we read in the journals
haunting the browning grasslands without care

and beneath one of those great american portraits
do I toil, out of respect, out of conscience
to remember the exodus of my parents
to reach further, to pay forward,
knowing our portrait still remains to paint