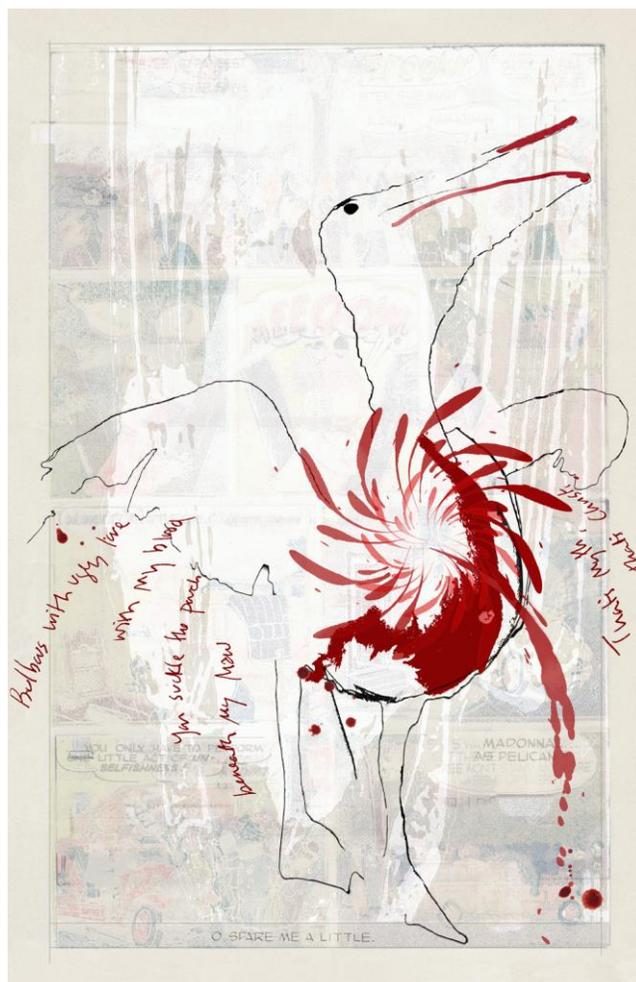


MADONNA AS PELICAN

Celia Bland



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Education of the Virgin

Virgin Mary has never ventured
to the caves of Texas
where bats – little shudders –
breed like bad memories.
She has none,
you know, no packed bags
at the Union Station
where bats press themselves flat
against the peeling ceiling.
No shuddering regrets electrify
her epidermis like the flit of
a donkey's ear.
This defines her innocence:
the sadness she feels for souls
consigned to places always cold
where the only lights are those
flickers of conscience
we bring with us.

She did it only once and that
was a Eucharistic moment,
the apotheosis of grace,
as if her womb were lined
with Communion wafers.
It's God the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit
in there, swallowed, perhaps, and
passed, with a kiss,
through nether lips.

Virgin Mary never goes where she is unwanted.
She bows her head to the ecstatic
eradicators, tribe haters, sex haters,
haters of the poor.
If her hovel is bulldozed, she has a cousin
in Babylonia -- although moving, for Virgin Mary,
predicates cosmological occurrences, avian messengers –
and then there are the tickets
and checkpoints.

She turns her palms to the heavens.
A fine dust collects.

Life was a book Virgin Mary conned
until that death so public,
sap dripping along his legs slow
as the delineation of error from justice.
Getting down the body, unhooking his hands
like drapes from a rod —
only to stop a hole.

Virgin Mary Before the Winter Prom

Her attenuated neck accepts no responsibility
for teenaged breasts tugging buttons that cinch hourglass
hips. She is pelican, feet pinned one in front of the other.
Beaky side-glance.
She spreads jointed wings between parallel wires
of clothesline.

The line harnesses a collie panting to the
left of her round shank
in a dog house
of powdery asbestos shingles, remnants from some
siding salesman's crisscross,
a man who fit mill shacks
in chalky prom jackets --
like her father's house.

She tucks her wings in a feathery muff
abloom with poinsettia
bloody-red as what sustains my
stem and bones coiled within,
O lord!

Annunciation

My word will be

fierce even in sleep
bland as an
apple cheek

pungent.

Repeat as you breathe

and like your name

you are a white bird
bearing a word.

Madonna as Pelican

*O spare me a little
that I may recover my strength
before I go hence, or be no more seen.*

Awkward as anything built for cumbersome
endurance, bulbous with ugly love, with my blood,

you suckle the pouch beneath my
maw – that’s myth, that’s Christ, that’s why

I’m quiet and sustained. My bowed bones
are only yours, but feather-webbed and
more lonesome.

Madonna Combustion

Just as the crown of his head peaks then slips back
from the eyelid of my gate: a key approaching
then withdrawn—

just as his head tears the flesh
keeping him from here,
and my blood slips into the general sluice,

just as I feel the compression of my bare foot
pressing hard pack pigment - the force
of the bad momma I will become

thrusts him, sure as sin's piston, into breath

he blinks
he blinks

but it is me who cries.

Madonna of the Cigarette Machine

Drop your pocket change into my slot.

Modulated by slim levers and a semi-colon

soft packets – *one*

two

three –

slip along my galvanized trough
once you pull these yellowing knobs.

A simple mechanism, yes, but
Ka-ching!

miraculous this
sweet contraction and
release
and a book of matches.

Madonna of Materialism

Should I be good?
I am cane sugar crystallized
on the papillae of the American idiom – no ideas,
longing for things.

No one has provided me with
courage or a station wagon.

When I was little
I wanted a two-car
garage I could leap from
and a trampoline.

I have settled like a porch,
like a belly, like sponge cake.

Should I go bad?
Go out for milk and bacon
at a bodega
in Nicaragua –

anywhere
beyond these borders?

Madonna of the Suitcase

From her hand it hangs:
brown, scuffed, tied
shut with his suspenders--
one hasp snapped,
the other open, open.

How did she marry him, carry him
impaled upon her tit for ten years?
Upstairs she moaned and gasped but he left
his suitcase and stuck out his thumb.

It's my own thumb I hold
in my palm as she embraces me
at the airport,
having dropped her panties
into the silky pocket
of his leather shell.

Can I love her? Can I take his
antler-handles into my hands
and take her home?

Checklist for Madonna

Stand, grunt, wash out coffee cup.
Use cup to water six pots of thirsty pansies,
some royal purple, some veiny-blue
lining the sill above the sink.
Petals and leaves, hairy as baby's fontanel,
smell of something turned.
The smell of funk, a little sulfurous.
A hot iron and spray starch.
Hang a shirt on a hanger on the handle
of a cabinet in the kitchen.
Hook the hanger on the necks of blouses
already hooking the handles of cabinets in the kitchen.
Admire the ironed and perfectly creased
wings of trousers and sleeves blocking
what's in the cabinets and what's in the drawers.
Sit on the Laz-E-Boy. Don't recline.
Fry up a piece of livermush in a
non-stick fry pan.
Double a sheet of paper towel
for a piece of livermush.
Watch a little *Ho, Johnny!*
Close-fasten your nightgown with a silver safety pin,
slip into blue robe and terry cloth slippers.
Stand with an *ugh* or
sit on Laz-E Boy.
Wiggle toes.

Air Madonna

Nameless along gangways
we wheel our pasts and passes
like covenants, hoist our presents
into overhead bins.
Buckled in, we are counted
in anticipation by attendants
in stereo. We bide elbows and breaths,
count clouds
plural and singular assumptions:
ascendant, being
borne unceasingly into future.

Madonna Bomb

There are no words to describe the way she hunches
belly resting on thigh, key turned on and she cannot
turn it off, working the brake with her other foot. It's hard to see
into the distance, sitting like that.

She drives a dichotomous street,
the blood flowing in and out, birth and death, every turn
leading to this one and a line of Hummers, the check point
where she must slow.

They will not like her duct-tape mittens
(as if her hands were very cold) but she cannot roll
down the window with her hands stuck at 10 and 2.

Is it very hot inside her womb as she moves
faster down the street we all travel?
Does she cry, "My God, my God!" or merely "Mary!" ?

She has ever eschewed the first person pronoun, savoring "I" like
a phosphorescence. It's all the same, isn't it, whether she
is dead before or after impact?

Turn your hands up to heaven.
Let the eyes of your palms, flaccid
as the maws of lilies,
look to those clouds.

What passes there casts shadows
that move away from where they're going
and towards you.

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