

# Selected Poems

Lauren Amalia Redding

PEN AND BRUSH  
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# Pen and Brush

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Pen and Brush provides a platform to showcase the work of excellent female writers to a broader audience. Pen and Brush electronically publishes literary fiction and poetry curated by literary professionals who support our vision.

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# Publisher's Note

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# Selected Poems

# after emily dickinson

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Wears a thick coat, this man,  
Of crushed salty sheen and quick rustles;  
Were I a queen, I would declare  
Him divine. Shield away, but no  
Queen am I. My crown is of  
My own rusted braids. Look at his curious  
Hands, they made it that way.

He is divine; his voice, of wine  
Runs my blood thin and laces  
My tongue  
(Sweet rosé, aged in  
doldrums, sweet wake of  
delirium)  
With meteors.

“I” is no noun to him, but a grave,  
Dug of shovels. They are of a crushed salty sheen.  
I jump down amidst a gown’s  
Quick rustles. My path, paved by those  
With thick coats, warning me  
Of hallowed encryptions  
Written before my wedding day.

# coral lips punch-drunk

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At eighteen I took flight to a city worth saving  
I careened to Chicago, I was so punch-drunk from escaping

I had been knocked down before, great heaving blows  
That split the coral lips of my childhood.  
But in Chicago I was knocked down onto sidewalks on streets of my own choice, and that was different.  
I had chosen to push through crowds of Midwestern steelworkers' prodigies  
And Judith surfaced in that grunting Mecca, and felt so wild

Wild in that I had my own life  
Forged from my very callus nerve,  
Decadent din of steel—  
Wild in that I carried myself and my brother through those streets and shielded us—  
With every incandescent inch of my own skin—  
And when blood was drawn, fine rivulets etching barbed-wire silhouettes into my naked chest,  
Electric lights cascaded from my fingertips and at least lit the way for him.

# yo voy

---

*Yo*, American in tooth, in study  
A fluttering case, with valid I.D.—  
I go, *yo voy*, burning in my mouth.  
*Yo voy*, I go, deep into the scars of night  
With tangerine candy, citrus to cool  
*Mi boca*—my mouth, *¡fumando!*  
What other smooth-skinned girl  
Goes to confession with cement for feet?

*Y yo empiezo*, God how I start.  
My tempered hands once were museum art.  
*Soy la leyenda impenetrable*,  
I am Avalon, I am the snow.

“

We were painting, in a room of speckled white.  
He smells sweet-peppery—maybe like  
The southwest. His eyes are the  
Jaded Gulf Green the desert barricades.  
*Los sentía*. I felt them swing  
From my face to the face on my canvas,  
The ocean, *su piel*; the desert,  
*Sus pensamientos*.

¿Shaman cubano, my royal  
Blood, *por qué* does  
My heart beat Carribean?

”

*Y yo resumo*, God how I resume.  
In my tresses once danced peacock plumes.

“

He is so awkward—he is tense  
In his Aryan shoulders, but his  
Mouth is indifferent. He is like  
A giraffe, a guess with lopsided grace.

“Grace”—how simple a word,  
How inappropriate for the only  
God who would rather be a muse.  
But rather than let his goatee  
Brush my neck, rather than let  
His laurels electrocute my canvas,  
He stands *sólo*—  
    Inches away from all my senses—  
        And breathes pale, awkward.”

Educator, remind me to bring you  
Mamá’s mestizo yucca next time.

“  
In the past, he dwelt in cathedral spires.  
He never was a liege—more of  
A gypsy king, a scripture-writer.  
And as I told him of four hundred  
Years from *hoy*, he grew quiet;  
His humming faded, his posture  
Still (nearly tremulous); and he remembered some other  
Thing-to-do, place-to-be, *encuentro*.

*Pero*, before he left, before I wished  
For one minute more, even if it were  
One in the life of J. Alfred Prufrock  
(To whom he introduced me, a  
Liberation done cordially)—  
He swept his ivoryed fingers  
Across the curve, the feminine  
In my back; and he couldn’t  
Have expressed it better in his lips,  
This act so poised, so curious,  
Never awkward, just *muy verdadero*.

Padrino, why do you smile? I see no  
Cheshire in La Habana, nor la Isla de Pinos.”

*Y yo recuerdo*, God how I remember.  
I heard el Diablo in his words last September.

“

Absolve me of this danger, this gnawing  
Peligroso, which haunts my sleep—

Like a tendril of cigar smoke, opaque  
In its turns and green in its twists.  
Everything is new (did you note the green?),  
And so I returned, Chicago glistening to the right,  
To my room, and held my little elephant.  
Carved of exotic spices, polished with Punjabi,  
Admired by his enigmatic eyes, in which  
I see the bay in which I was born.

”

*Y yo cambio*, God how I change.  
I grow quiet, for a muse casts snow upon a stage.

“

Absolve me of this liting thought,  
Absolve me of this berating flame.  
How I loathe myself, Padre,  
For every vulnerability I have is cast  
As silver amulets into his skin.

I give you this little elephant, an offering,  
*Un movimiento, significando que*  
*Yo estoy pintado en colores tu viste,*  
Santería halo around my American tresses.

”

Forfeiture is sweet—and demure is  
The carved giraffe I ran back with  
Wrapped in tangerine candy wrappers,  
Facing south, facing jade Gulf shores.