

KING TUTANKHAMUN:  
ONCE THERE WAS A BOY WHO LOVED TO WHISTLE

Young pharaoh, I studied  
your museumed effigies catching light,  
posed on the threshold of blue and saffron,  
paused in the old dreams from the head of Horus:  
Morning renascence out of a lotus,  
rolling across the arch of heaven on sun wheels,  
rafting under-earth rivers near shoals  
of Osiris, wrapped in the shawls of Ptah.

Mortal eyes are splended with your accessories,  
a glut of gold and gods. And everywhere  
your face with your ankh-eyes  
reflecting on your mirror world.  
You must have seen eyes when yours were closed,  
always looking at you,  
a thousand replicas to fill your own.

I saw you at the bowstring: hunter, warrior,  
hero-murals of a lord, a moral for your subjects,  
foiled with lapis, carnelian, turquoise.  
And in the end, failed by the vulturine wingspan  
and splayed serpent hood.

But back in the trailing edges of light,  
before the artists' tales and the godsmith's tolls,  
before they changed your name:  
there was a laughing lad. I saw him  
through a tear in the papyrus, rollicking  
barefoot on sands old before legends began.  
You on a sun-gilded afternoon.  
Learning how to whistle.

It is he beneath the priceless mask:  
Amarna man-child with puckered mouth  
framing melodies for the songless ibis,  
and turning Selket's head.  
On moon-chilled desert I can hear him  
softly beyond death and myth.

Author's note: The little goddess Selket, found beside Tut's  
canopic jars is the only sculpture or painting of the period  
not looking straight forward. Her head is turned as if she is  
listening to an unexpected, pleasant sound.

--Glenna Holloway,  
1st prize, THE REACH OF SONG, 1982;  
reprinted, WORDSMITH, 1992;  
GOING 60, Chicago Poets, 1998



ON THE EDGE

This day, this shaper of air  
to fit a skin of salt marsh scent  
This sound falling through a treble staff  
to merge with dark bass my soles can feel

This deep width I can't see around  
or across and could wander weeks  
and still be on the outmost dimension  
This text, my tongue tasting of pewter font  
below antique welkins

No more magnetic north, no roads  
Miles turned inside out  
leaving no tracks where they went

These grains, part sea salt, part drift  
of forgotten continents, no line between  
solid and light from this lunar ghost  
never walked on, this chilled eclipse

This spiral galaxy colonized by spartina grass  
This hand of mine reaching down to neap tide  
to sift out my grandfathers' footprints  
running before the always wind

-- Glenna Holloway  
NOTRE DAME REVIEW, 2002



## AFTERNOON AMONG THE ARTIFACTS

I almost missed it among the other displays, almost  
didn't notice the thing that changed the world.

This one's named "The Fat Man," a bulbous unarmed twin  
of Nagasaki's nemesis. Obsoletely catching dust,  
cornered in an aircraft museum outside Milwaukee.

Hard to think it a bomb or even a weapon.  
Could be a time capsule, maybe filled with oddments  
of the 20th century's first third: a rumble seat,  
a beaded flapper dress, a bathtub for making gin.  
All things before my time but no more alien  
than this bulging precedent shadowing the floor.  
Forerunner of smaller packages of streamlined rage.  
We went fast from atomic to hydrogen to smart missiles,  
strange interstices filled with equations  
that all tongues don't translate the same.

This huge clumsy egg is abstract art. It should seethe  
with metaphor, vibrate with the voice of Isaiah  
above the wails of hell. I'm curiously detached.  
I'm missing something.

Maybe that first blast-- the one called "Little Boy,"  
damaged our inner ears and eyes, jarred spaces  
in our universal cortex so we can't relate  
one thing to another. A cerebral non sequitur.

I wander among the airplanes, mostly wings of war.  
More than fifty years of progress in flight. I pause  
beneath a red ultralight, stare at a lunar lander,  
reflect on "The Fat Man's" progeny  
stashed in secret places like family insanities.

Back at the forebear, a kid scrawls  
an obscenity in yellow crayon on its rough surface.  
I try to wipe it off; it only smears. The kid  
gives me a practiced sneer as he runs away.

Maybe he's right. Maybe Eliot was too elegant.  
Maybe the world, inured to bangs and whimpers,  
ends with a single blurted scatological curse.

--Glenna Holloway,  
A DIFFERENT LATITUDE, 1998