

A Cento: Laudato Si'

Mona T. Lydon-Rochelle

*Before the world existed, the holy
people made themselves visible by
becoming the clouds, sun, moon, trees,
water, thunder, rain, snow...that way,
they said, we would never be alone.*

LUCI TAPAHONSO

I

The poet's question
confronts the poem,
by way of the poem
the place, by way of
the place, the world.
Our world is gravely damaged.

Sister earth cries—
What harm you've inflicted
on me through misuse and abuse
(acidification, rapidification, deforestation).

See how these words bend
under the weight of the wind
(word after word, end without end)?
Listen to brother wind's gospel.
There is holiness on the earth.
I stand where beggars stand,
those dark and haggard ones,
drifting up and down. I grasp
you, and drifting like the wind
across the wild sea, I am still far away.

Sister water weeps—
why do you turn my wonderland
seas into underwater cemeteries?
I will show you light on a gull wing
in a mussel shell glinting opal sunlight,
numberless shells on the shoreline,
on a shore of washed stones,
under a sky the color of stone
secreted in mist.

Come to my ocean to harvest
sea kelp and pearls. Each rock pool
a garden of color, bronze and blue,
rose of coral algae, ochre of sponge,
where whelk and starfish turn
in the stillness of my garden.

Kneel before my white wall,
write your name upon the water.
See the hours passing like clouds,
and then, lie as still as the clouds,
thinking of all that has been lost
in our lifetime, the cleanliness of water lost.

II

What of the wild fauna and flora,
which children will never see,
lost forever? Sister earth feeds
us in her sovereignty, producing fruits
with colored flowers and herbs,
blessing us with swift winged birds,
lions, stags and leaping roes.

Dream chaste flowers, of being a dove,
or a small cloud hanging above
a shredded moon. Will the small white
dove return cooled by the breeze
of its flight and breathe the air?
Sink in the hems of your senses.
I hear your dreams like wind



and willing like the trees
I speak to you many syllables.
I speak to you green meadows
coated bright with flowers.
I speak to you rivers glinting topaz.
You were made for love,
every leaf enleafing all
the grove of our eternal orchardists.

You're circling around God,
you've been circling for thousands of years.
Are you a falcon, a storm or a vast song?
Whatever bird you used to be, hawk or tern,
fierce or shy, these birds are dead.

How have you contributed
to the disfigurement and destruction of creation?

III

Be forewarned of the impacts of environmental
degradation and war on the poor!

Hunger, famine, people eating anything
(lizards, barn swallows, salt grass).
Women wrapped in lappas waiting
on wood benches, their litanies
of rape washing a blood moon.
Or red clouds of smoke and splinters
of bone, skin sizzling, one-hundred-and twenty
ways they died alone. Or was it together
in front of the cross praying?
And then, the next day hummingbirds
took their hair from skulls to weave
nests under the pear-shaped
stars in orchards of womblike fruit.
I hear weeping.

IV

I hear the sound of desert waters
from a mountain stream,
the sound of hot springs
as they rise from the earth,
the sound of rain on desert stone.
Rest in the fragrance of sage.
Rest in the hummingbird's song.
Rest as if a young child, again.

What of brother desert?
External deserts of our world
grow because our internal deserts
are wasted and vast!
We plunder her at will,
violence in our hearts,
reflected in sickness of soul,
soil, sea and sky. In my visions I see
with winds and waters and woods.

V

Now, heed a poet's incantation:
I am a wind on a deep lake
I am a hawk above the cliff
I am a tide that drags to death
I am a hill where poets walk.

There is an island of serenity
in the poet's mind like June sun in an orchard,
a rustle in the silk of afternoon,
the droning of an ill-natured bee.
I wish to live free from hate,
and make my verses, as the rivers
that moisten the earth, fresh and pure.

*CENTO SOURCES—Wendell
Berry, Pope Francis, Seán Pádraig
Ó Ríordáin, Rainer Maria Rilke,
Michael Longley, Jeanie Thompson,
Anita Endrezze, John Montague,
Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, St. Francis
of Assisi, John of the Cross, Jorge
Carrera Andrade, Dante, Michael
Hartnett, Patriarch Bartholomew,
Mona Lydon-Rochelle, Benedict XVI,
Amergin, Alfonso Guillén Zelaya.*

*From the Latin word for "patchwork," the cento
(or collage poem) is a poetic form made up of
lines from poems by other poets.*

NOTRE DAME REVIEW
ISSUE 43, WINTER/SPRING 2017