

Eulogy for Davy Crockett
--for Cordelia Candelaria

Burn in Hell, Davy. Git!
Take off with you, villain.
Stare wild-eyed for eternity
beneath the fake turf of
Walt Disney Memorial Gardens.
Bond with your whiskey-swilling
companeros in the flames of
Santa Anna's pyre. In the end
it's the same. You and Betsy
have tracked and dogged me
as a third to your tryst
beyond the pale of my patience.
I have no peace or privacy from
Sunday night by the tube to
Saturday night at the movies.
You sit there cross-legged, casual
as can be, as I read my romances.
You then show up, registered and
official-like, in history class. No
gentle folkie this time but a bully
like my crazy cousin in his coonskin cap.

Meanwhile those Mexicans,
whoever they may be, stare back
from the page and the screen.

Die, damn it. Or *me Alamo*.
One or the other, man! God knows
your sacrifice was really mine.

Hedge Ghosts

Like anyone I wanted
elders and epic heroes
and not such ghosts as these
who agree to be questioned
on selected subjects only
like the boredom on the farm
and their restless dreams. I wanted
clear-toned history and lofty calls
for justice and not such ghostly static
like a radio signal from afar,
for it's not distance
that prompts these ghosts to hem and haw
on the particulars of their shiftless ways
or their youthful forays into foreign lands
that climaxed explosively
with bowel bursts in the scrub brush
of Nuevo Santander.

A Migrant in Corpus Christi

Tennessee wetbacks drifting....
--Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree*¹

Getting off
the bus, bone-tired,
with the migrants
at Corpus Christi,
I could have been
a beaten soldier
come home
or a wife
on the lam
in my ornery body
that could not
forget Monterey, TN,
or how to work a job
or crave a bed
or want a meal.

At that moment
the sky-tossed voices
of Gulf lives sang anew,
rose high-sounding like
something lonesome not cruel
indeed close enough
to embrace in both arms
as if I had listened
for the first time
to sole-trodden earth.

I saw at once
that the lights flickering
on the time-crowded highway
were a sacred dance music
whose insistent rhythms
threaded the broken night
like the tortured limbs
of a patriarchal tree
or the veined cracks
in a fancy mirror
brought home to a wife
from a war gone by.

¹ McCarthy, Cormac. *Suttree*. New York: Random House, 1979.

Dancing off the pavement,
each rhythmic note sang another.

As the music
flickered sweetly
in the Dark Belt
of the sunlit plains,
a lost war
came back to me.

On Patrol

The Smoky Mountain
Troopers
stop me on suspicion
of smuggling contraband
and posing
as an Appalachian
gone missing.

They detain me, telling me
only
that I have no rights.
It's an immigration issue.
Which side am I on?

I can neither remain silent
nor phone the family.

I try to tell them
that I must travel
to touch faces,
visit burial places,
heal the wounds
inflicted on those
who cross the passes
of Appalachia.

Besides, I'm the speaker
at a conference.

In denim uniforms, the lawmen
rifle my bag
for copies of *Das Kapital*
and *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

"I reckon it looks that way,"
they whisper, so
they analyze my speech
for intruding diphthongs,
clipped vowels, and
Internet slang.

(They bring out Lomax's tape recorder.)

More safe than sorry,
they search my person
for piercings, tattoos,
saints' medals, and gold crucifixes.

Then, with canvas garden gloves
they probe my
hidden cavities
for objects of latex or vinyl.

I must confess,
they tell me,
to polluting and stirring
the waters
with my own body.

"Rivers pay no mind to borders,"
I tell them.
"Bodies of water have always
been borders," they answer.

The men want documents—
a property deed,
a birth certificate,
a driver's license.

I try to explain
that my ancestral lands
crumbled bit by bit
under the crush
of global capitalism.

Luckily, I've kept
my Atomic City birth certificate.

As a trump card, I had them
the driver's license renewed
from out-of-state
for thirteen years. They ask,
"Is this your real address?"

But it has not escaped my notice.

These Appalatchiks drive
all-terrain SUVs—
the kind often seen
in gated communities.

Austin's Edelweiss

[Elisabet Ney (1833-1907) was a European portrait sculptor. In 1873, she moved to Texas, where she achieved renown as a sculptor of legendary Texans. Her best-known works are portraits of Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin.]

Picture Houston,
the Tennessee Volunteer,

leaving
the mountain schoolhouse
and the James White Fort,

skirting
the Hermitage,
Crockett's
homeplace,
and Graceland,

just
marching
and
marching

in his rush
to the Mississippi.

Picture Houston
stopping
under her chisel

like white marble
or flaking plaster—

just
holding his pose
for Austin's Edelweiss.

Picture him
posing
all the empty miles

but never reaching
glory
at the Alamo.