

## Texture: Louisiana,

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Poetry, however, must say everything.  
Marcelin Pleynet, "The Method," trans. Serge Gavronsky,  
*Violence of the White Page, Contemporary French Poetry*

~

Confess our sins. We strive, to ash.

Arrive in New Orleans. They hose down streets and other surfaces, the clear. The following morning, everyone repaints. The hotel lobby, bars along Bourbon Street.

The grease from poles, to keep the crowds from climbing. Straddled, this long-distance horse.

In a second hand bookstore, a poetry collection by Norma Cole, inscribed to Andrei Codrescu. Apparently he had too many books.

Confess our sins. The riverboat wash.

~

In 1821, Jean Mouton bestowed Vermilionville. A designate, along Vermilion River. Renamed for war hero General Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette. A Frenchman, aiding the American Army during the American Revolution.

A bastion of French, both language, culture. Cajon, Creole, Acadian.

I am translucent skin.

The Battle of Vermilion Bayou, April 17, 1863. Third in a series running between Union Major General Nathaniel Prentice Banks and Confederate Major General Richard Taylor. What had we to say.

Am a tourist through these pages. I have no right.

Birds could never fly this high. Capital to capital.

Drop down in New Orleans. We flood, we persevere. We drown.

~

In 1812, Andrew Jackson dreamed of Redbones. He did not dream the Battle of New Orleans.

Stephen says, Richard Froude's title, *Fabric*, translates from Latin into English as "text." Think, he says, of textiles.

In transit, make a time change I don't realize. Imagine: I compose this an hour before you might have suspected.

In 2012, I etched a statue of Andrew Jackson's horse into my memory.

Both horse and Jackson could easily have existed, one without the other.

~

I am writing about periphery. A strange and outside knowledge of a country I know much about, and yet, remarkably little. I know what they tell me.

Can any journey be pilgrimage only if one expects to learn something? If we are driven by spirit to move and be moved, and therefore, changed.

A professor at the university says that, when leaving the United States, he has an ambiguous feeling about the country he doesn't, while at home. Knows what he thinks.

At the end of our meal, the restaurant quickly converts to Salsa Dance Club. They turn down house lights, up the beat, and strobe. We are welcome to stay as long as we wish, they tell us. Push our chairs to the door.

~

In Lafayette, poet Skip Fox talks about Canadian poet Christian Bök, who stayed with him for three days, for the sake of a reading. Particular, folded, neat. The poem Bök is working to construct out of DNA, the building blocks of life.

As Fox said: It is the Word made Flesh. Bök, chagrined. A grinning Fox.

The oldest, most famous and most prevalent metaphor from the dominant religion of western civilization. What Fox infers, suggests: Bök continuing the original work of God.

What might you think of that, dear Audubon?

~

Laughs, in the secular dark. My people.

The table next orders Alligator Pie.

Ash Wednesday, a mark upon the forehead. Catholic rites. Andrew Jackson rides a statue horse. He saved the city from British invasion during the last moments of the War of 1812. British who hadn't received the message yet the war was over, treaty signed. The Americans lost few, and the British more.

Life is a highway. The Mississippi River.

~

Lake, upon. The mighty Mississippi.

The smell, the smell, the whole French Quarter. Hosed, hungover, swept.

Horses, drawn. The river snakes east, west, south, north; squirrels to open. Steamers burn.

Tropical trees and *Fleur de Lis*, an almost complete absence of spoken French. An Anglicization of re-appropriated words.

Revel in Zydeco, instead. Eleni Sikelianos in *The Book of Jon*: “These stories speak of human history.”



~

Blue sky, rail. Fahrenheit, seventy degrees. At home, well below zero. We should have brought shorts. Christine sends an email, traffic: one hundred traffic accidents since noon.

Fester, recollection. Turtle soup, the spicy alligator sausage. Crawdads.

Our hotel, prides itself on brothel history. Portraits in the bar.

Live sex shows: what might performers do with off-time? Read Wittgenstein, Lacan. Wonder about the nature of the soul, separate from the body.

Make love quiet, slow. Those private things that they can only keep.

~

Song, to its architecture.

Aspects of the carny, hustle. Wave your hands. Come in, come. Billboards speak to women, strip clubs, cater. We deflect, successful.

Hand grenades. Sketch another postcard, rich.

Man in the Tropical Isle's Bayou Club sells us a snapshot. He is standing beside Magic Johnson.

An absence of families, walk. Mid-American. The elderly couple in from West Virginia.

~

Stephen suggests, there should be an index to such things.

In Houston, a forty-minute stop-over. I pause to purchase a snow globe. Capital letters spell out HOUSTON, fortify a NASA astronaut, three inches tall. Christine, who attended space camp as a teenager, twice.

How we can see, now, snow in empty space.

In 2011, the United States cancelled their space program, four decades worth of exploration. Their budget makes the moon impossible.

In Washington, D.C., changing flights again, we are forced to switch terminals, thusly leaving security to re-enter. The snow globe, confiscated. We can't allow that here. Please.

This article is a stub. You can expand.

~

When I think of Spanish settlement in the United States, I think of churches. I think of Zorro, freedom fighting. What little I know from here. California, the coast. Los, los.

The wind picks up. Our steamboat cruise. It bowls us over.

In the vampire store, Stephen purchases a hand-bound leather notebook. For the paper, says. Almost as the leather itself. Blank, unbleached. Let my hand across the texture.

Unmarked. Pre-text, as it were.

He would not consider the blood-vials. Safe as tiny houses.

New Orleans: I seek out the cold from my bones. Gone, somewhere. I almost miss.

Stephen speaks, but I don't hear. Somewhere within the pages of a book.

~

I compose these postcards to Christine. As days progress to evening, the images deliberately more risqué. It speaks to risk. A river as long as its name.

The eighteenth state. Two centuries, abide. A truth held up to beads.

The waitress, the waitress. Is made of butter.

I compose another postcard. Christine still at work. A snowstorm, howls. Home.

Waitress calls us “sweet faces.” Hands us our bill.

~

The graves hold above ground, set the water line. A line of water, speaks.

The levee, breaks. And dry.

The moisture in the warm air nearly solid, immediate once we de-plane, step. A moisture barrier, at once.

~

Two hundred thousand native French speakers in Louisiana. We meet but one.

Introduced in school, immersion. Questioned, what might be gone a generation. Children speak what their parents don't know, grandparents and beyond knew first, knew only.

The story of a Middle Eastern village, nestled. That spoke the same dialect, unchanged, as Christ. What then fought harder to retain.

In Ottawa, the Gaelic choir, Ar n-Oran, sing out their hearts. Refill, an endless gulf.

~

A crawdad sky. Not for the fish she fishes.

Settled by a man, a man, another man. Horse dung. Palimpsest, of smells. The water hangs in, humid. Liquid air. Bring up the dawn, the dusk.

Settled by a man. A slew of men. Slept. My right hand fell asleep.

Virgin Mary shadows the cathedral, impossibly large.

Settled by a woman. Men need not apply. Closed for Mardi Gras, but open.

The crescent city. Circles the sun.



~

The War of 1812. Louisiana, officially a state that year. Two hundred. The same year that first steamboat river-bound, arrives.

The boundary, where we meet.

Claimed for Spain, in 1541. Hernando de Soto.

*The Streets of San Francisco* (1972-1977): Michael Douglas and Karl Malden drove uphill every morning fast as beans, worked episodes as gravity took the whole day, fighting downhill crime, an ease. Until they came to water. Nightly, bay. Into the credits, slept.

Saturated. All the world is underwater. Swaths cut from bayou, swamp, the river rivers. Supercedes, the land below. Etched for concrete trail, the Interstate from New Orleans to Baton Rouge to Lafayette.

~

Sometimes, we are made of mirrors.

Louisiana: I read a poem about the War of 1812, titled “The War of 1812.” Until now, I had no idea about the Battle of New Orleans, or how it related.

Mistakes were made. We don’t always have the correct information.

William Shakespeare, who died April 23, 1616, according to the Julian Calendar. Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, died ten days later on the same date, according to the relatively new Gregorian Calendar.

In Beauregardville, Baton Rouge, we have the best root beer I’ve ever tasted, made on location.

They serve up “freedom fries,” without any sense of irony.

~

This is not the only American Lafayette. Oh, my sweet Lafayette, sang Lucinda Williams.

Toronto poet Camille Martin spent over a decade in New Orleans, until Katrina. One of the relocated. Headed north.

After fourteen Louisiana years, now teaches sonnets to Ryerson writing students. One line for every year.

Gulf, a chasm. Empty.

The French Quarter, invented by the Spanish. It is not, we're told, true New Orleans. It is the French Quarter.

So many sentences, imagined.

Rufus Wainright: I'm so tired of America.

~

Magnolia, blossoms. Stephen orders mint juleps, twice. The pestle crushes leaves. Or spoon. The flat of the round.

Poverty Point. A vantage, you can see forever.

We ride out, Orphan Train. The town of Opelousas. These people, of migration.

The American Revolution, which went on to influence the French Revolution. Let them eat cake.

And we do, there. Crabcakes like we've never known.

Antoine's, made. "The state's oldest continuously operating restaurant," opened in 1840. Older than our country.

~

1722: New Orleans the capital. At once.

Stephen sketches out a poem, Molly's Irish Pub. French Quarter, where reception bleeds, blacks out. Cellphone misses, calls. Repeated.

I am trying to remember a name.

1849: the capital to Baton Rouge, to distance from temptation.

What does this say of Baton Rouge. We drive through, don't stop.

Stop. Don't stop, she says. Once I am home.

~

Twin engines swim, fan out. State Troopers, multiply. Divide the traffic, stretch an eye out on the straight path lines, and follow.

Where there is land and only land, imaginary. Six feet under, waves. The graveyard stone must rise.

In 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte he set his pen, relenting. Napoleon's American Dream, released Louisiana Purchase. Four cents an acre, sum. Napoleon, set down his pen, most likely quill. Before the slave revolt, before No Man's Land. Before Confederacy. The steamboat, tours.

The rumors of my death, says Mark Twain (aka Samuel Clemens).

But then again, his tall tales. This, too, a story.

Am I the uneven surface that you speak of?

~

In February 2012, by the Mississippi edge, a spray of dust up over the famous Cajun restaurant patio. Stephen was composing notes toward a poem, flipping pages of Nicanor Parra. *Antipoems: How To Look Better & Feel Great*. One man cutting grass, a most wondrous scent. This is what I know of home. Suspends.

Another man behind him, packs a leaf-blower. The Delta, blew.

As Alice Notley writes, being in the fabric of it.

Cloud through the propeller scatters, fractals. Snowflakes made of moistened air.

**Acknowledgments:**

This for Christine, my constant centre.

“Texture: Louisiana,” is the result of an American trip with Stephen Brockwell, February 22-25, 2012; we were in and around New Orleans and Lafayette, Louisiana, in part for a reading we did together at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette on February 24, 2012, organized and hosted by poet Marthe Reed. This piece is dedicated to both Brockwell and Reed, with many thanks. Much gratitude, also, to Camille Martin and Megan Burns for generous feedback.

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