

FROM WHERE THE RIVERS COME

ROBBIN MARTINELLI

*unto the place from where the rivers flow,
they will flow again.
Ecclesiastes 1.7*

The platform
Of the Norte Station welcomed him to Madrid
Where all the trains finish their run
And cabs wait ready at the whistle.

Placing his baggage on a floor
That time had worn with inconsideration,
The little colonel embraced the solitary air,
Looking west to the brilliance of a sunset
Against the dark and inky corridor of change,

Finding isolation against northern frugality,
Sipping slowly to tongue the sweet ridges of fermented time.
The New York apprentice opened his passport,
Pausing like a southern hawk
Into the eccentricity of its image.

And in that sphere of beauty,
He understood "The mountain,
The trying sense of man's vision,"
The necessary consummation with "fear . . ."
Inhaling its sour breath
To reach "the summit of that ambition . . ."

Looking around to see who hadn't noticed him yet,
Truman Capote walked over to the empty seat.
"Let us leave it to history," Mailer said,
Exhaling his handshake to Fear instead,
Where neither refused the meeting;
An empty exchange of Time for dread morbidity,
In the corner of Hemingway's last round.

An anxious clerk taking up dreams in a rifle,
Papa, trained well an itchy finger,
Losing aim in the foggy breath of
An inner landscape, looking west into the Sun,
Casting an eye east toward the nightmare of his odyssey,
Killing what he had begun.

*A fowl breast at his feet,
Weathered feathers beset in the flight of an eagle's feast.*

A lifetime fighting the bull's fight, stab or be devoured,
Thirsting for the very things that destroyed him.
Playing the long run in a losing battle
When losing is never an option,
A worn out herdsman
Mistaking dreams for realities.

*Come sweet death in the hour of my art,
Where in its mystery, the performance of
Dying is exalted in the turbulence of its passion.*

Painting blood on a carved-out silhouette,
Molded at the potter's wheel
In the clay of hedonism,
Molded into the piercing realism of his reflection,
He looked into a cold blue abyss of Narcissian water
where
One saw God, and the other saw nothing in the drift.

Nothing but fear —
Tearing through lions like a bullet.

“Mercy Father, hold back your trigger!”

*Wait in the day's embrace,
Touch your hand, see the dim
Sorrow of death in the afternoon of your eyes
Without casting shadows,
So that I too, might survive the aura of glamour and power.*

Lurking against the night air,
The changing guard
Molted his armor in the hands of Jacob,
Leaving others to do the rest in the troubled ecstasy of beautiful things;
A courage of despair left in the shadow of shape,
The other left for the shadows of woods,
Bending himself toward the religion of moons and men.

Fishing for the nerve
And learning to keep the catch,
Mailer fingered with the line of perfect tension,
Knowing how Marlin play in
The laughter of criminal waves,
Ready with the knife and the net,

Tethered to an absent father
In the solitary silence at his ear;
Holding back to taste the stillness of his sour breath,
Rutting through life and death like rams
Entangled in a Chicago handshake
That never leaves

A
dangling man
above the rivers running.

NOTES

“from whence the rivers come,”: from Ecclesiastes. This is part of the same passage Hemingway used in his forward to *The Sun Also Rises*.

The Norte Station: passage from the ending of *The Sun Also Rises* regarded as “the end of the line . . .”

The Little Colonel: Hemingway’s name for Mailer

Truman Capote: a writer whom Mailer thought was “one of the bravest men in New York.” The interaction comes from a meeting in Brooklyn Heights. Capote believed that “If I’m not recognized in my own time then something absolutely awful is taking place in society.” From *The Paris Review* interview by Andrew O’Hagan, “Hemingway. Hitler. God-and me” (as rpt. in *NY Times*, August 8, 2007).

The directions reference Ecclesiastes as well as their perception of Hope in the East, Untamed West, Suffering South, and God’s North, a cold and distant presence to Hemingway.

“The mountain . . .”: a letter from Mailer to his parents regarding *The Naked and The Dead*.

“ . . .”: the unknown factor of both fear and ambition

“neither refused the meeting.”: From Robert Frost’s poem, “Out Out —” as life is harsh, and references Shakespeare’s “brief candle” in *Macbeth*.

“cold, blue Narcissian lake.”: Hemingway’s coldness to Mailer’s loyalty and admiration.

Narcissus: self-admiration to the point it kills him.

“Mercy father.”: From John Berryman, the son of a suicidal father as qtd. in *Hemingway: A Biography*, “Suicide and Aftermath” by Jeffrey Meyers

Jacob: Hebrew for supplanter, the second son of Isaac, the twin of Esau, and the father of 12 patriarchs. Mailer was also Jewish.

“Marlin” and “Criminal waves”: reference to his sport of fishing and being funded to spot enemy ships off the coast of Florida, which was nothing more than sport.

“dangling man”: a reference to Saul Bellow’s novel of the same name. Bellow’s went against Hemingway’s romantic machismo code and instead relishes a more realistic morality towards enlightenment, but his character soon realizes that he has failed in his search and is reduced to the same common physical, social and historical number in society. Both Hemingway and Mailer disagreed with this idea of becoming lost among the masses both personally, and in their writing.

The last stanza ending in nine lines links to the metaphysical world.

The poem moves from past tense into present tense to show transference, the pattern of influence and the changing guard of Hemingway into Mailer, who understood the Hemingway code.

Numerous connections to numerology, Hemingway’s life, passions, and his works.