

Selina Tusitala Marsh

The Young and the Restless (1994)

where are all you brown women?
where are all my selves?
eight fifty to see
another pretty blond blue-eyed face
not my face
not my skin or eye
screened yet again
for my pleasure –
leisure becomes arduous

is there a constitution
for prostitution
to be screened every other night?
Coloured black and red and sway
like they always do –
those sexy jungle bunnies

and my shades of brown fall down
and colour white slowly
like the snow on the tv
when all images are gone
then there is me
slow fade to black
a lack of identity
turns me down
tuns me off
screens my self
sentenced to irrelevancy

Where are all you brown women?
Have they made you more than maid yet?
Maine is a mammy on 'Young and the Restless'
Selina is the cop, she's young but she's useless
Hattie is a mama, she's ageless and sexless
Lieutenant U'hura is a go-go
she's thin and not breast-less
Mona Lisa is a seducer
she's cheap and she's hopeless
Diana Ross is Billy
she sings but she's tongue-less
Donna Summer the performer

was young now toothless
Oprah is the eyes
her mouth makes her waist-less
the gang girls boom-boom
their young but their tasteless

this less
is loss for me
craving for identity and screened reflections of what
I am not
leaves my brown selves
young and restless

rightsideup

flying fox cuts through the crepuscular gloom
singed bitter black words noose trees once frog-egg green
with story and song
fagogo once ripened now gone
to seed
dying in the eclipsed magination
shadowed from theoried
pagination

flying fox refuses her own dirge
shrieking a singular sound through the
hallowed latin halls
wing tips scratch walls
scouring the name of pe`a
spiralling over and over again
she hangs in a corner of the beige khaki Department
and sees rightsideup a world upsidedown

(n.b. fagogo (Samoan word for bedtime stories); pe`a (Samoan word for bat))

pig-tailed girl

it's as if
it was on every Herald front page
as if
every billboard caught the moment
of the pig-tailed girl running
from the Rangeview public toilets
baubles slapping scraped back
smudged top torn
blood on thighs and knees
screamingcrying into the park away
away from the man
emerging from the toilet
zippingrunning after bait

the cleaner saw
heard and saw
and couldn't quite believe until he found
blood on the concrete floor
in the end cubicle
of Rangeview public toilets

five surrounding primary schools reported
no one missing
she's gone
no follow-up article
him her darkness

12 years later
the Herald front-pages the crime scene:
a man hangs by his balls
from the chain of a Rangeview swing
a severed roll of meat
lies next to bloody HBs
a dog sniffs
then shits
on it.

Not another Nafanua poem

Not another nafanua poem she can hear them say as she attempts to ride the current of her culture in the new millennium with her electric waka I'm afraid so her shadow answers back in black but this ride's for nua's sister the one who stayed home and fed her father koko alaisa wiping his chin and fetching the key for the cupboard holding the toilet pepa for the faleuila outside while her famous warrior sister slay the stereotypes on an oceanic scale I'm afraid so because this is the story of how her sister had to replace the stolen coconuts meant for that evening's saka that the warrior took without asking to cover her womanhood I'm afraid so because someone had to feed the aiga harvest the kalo the bananas the pawpaw bagging them and dragging them to makeke fou to sell for kupe to pay the government school for the kids to get a scholarship up and out of here so they can come back and open a restaurant in apia and finally begin to tap into those rivulets of capitalism spilling over and into the sewers and into the streets and into the back roads of the kuabak villages except for nafanua's village someone has to tell said the shadow.

a twisting cestina

twisted tongues and hearts sinewed
ranked by education, flanked by need
the mantle sits awkward on her shoulders
adjusted by days and dust indeed she begins
to wear it her way as it parry's Walker's stones
and keeps her warm from Wendt's colonial chill

the karanga sounds she feels the chill
her bones frigid and muscles sinewed
against the dawn fog at this place of stones
a remembrance altar reminds her of her need
for those who face her back as she begins
to tread the tapa mantle laid, they walk shoulder to shoulder

and she feels his shoulder
warm against the chill
because he knows his shadow begins
at hers and their hearts are sinewed
as one as the pōwhiri welcomes their need
chest full of stones

they release white grey stones
adding it to the paepae, off their shoulders
and into the circle each one in need
of the other, to keep out the chill
and warmth reins in blood and sinewed
tongued-stars disperse genealogy, where one begins

place is underfoot and overhead, it begins
with mauga, sea and stones
it erupts in flesh sinewed
from foot to hand to head to shoulders
it spreads its warmth and when others feel the chill
for those bodies, there is no need

but the people need
ears and eyes ache to see as she begins
her mihi, her lauga, her mantle wrapped against the chill
at her feet the stones
that have been upon the shoulders
of those whose flesh she shares, sinewed

into hers, that is her need, her place of stones
that is where she begins, her tūrangawaewae, touching shoulders

with those who keep the chill from her tongueheart warm and sinewed.

(n.b. karanga (Māori: call); tapa (bark cloth); pōwhiri (Māori: ceremony of welcome onto a Marae); paepae (Samoan: stoned path; to lay words as to not offend); mauga (Samoan: mountain); mihi (Māori: speech of introduction); lauga (Samoan: speech); tūrangawaewae (Māori: standing place, homeground))

a tide, a term, a story (for R.S.)

the restless surging of ocean is a term,
moana nui a kiwa, tiding
like a tongue over lip, it dips
and rises to tell the story
Pasifika

the restless surging of the term is an ocean
moana, a tongue over lip, like a
tide it dips and rises in Pasifika
telling a story

like a tongue moana nui a kiwa
talkstory, restless surging of lips
a term dips and rises like the
term Pasifika

ocean lip tiding to tell
moana, a term surging like
Pasifika nui a kiwa,
a tongue dipping
into a story