Spring 1989

Canto 1989

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Canto

a magazine of literature and the arts
Spring 1989

CANTO

—a magazine of literature and the arts—
CANTO, noun, from the Latin *cantus*, "a song," (1) a major division in a long poem, (2) an art and literary magazine published by students at Kent State University Stark Campus in Canton, Ohio.

CANTO is published yearly by the students of Kent Stark. Canto invites submission of poetry, short fiction, essays, black and white photography and drawings by Kent Stark students, faculty and staff. Canto is intended to be an open forum for an exchange of ideas between members of the campus and for showcasing creative talents. Submissions should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Following publication, all rights revert to artists and writers and one contributor's copy will be sent to each contributor as payment. Address all correspondence to CANTO, c/o Steno Center, Kent State University Stark Campus, 6000 Frank Ave. N.W. Canton, OH 44720.
CANTO

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TABLE BY THE WALL

by B. J. Warner

Think
he said how
conversation might be
if the only
things you discussed were
limited
to immediate
experience:

and the days grow longer
and the nights
shorter

imagine
he said the
distance between you
and your people
while they stayed
you went
you went instead
to the university--

and the whales were rescued today

and while
they laugh and
enjoy each
other's company
you sit
alone
and take
the table by
the wall.
THE RED DESERT

by W. Lee Porter

Alone, all others are gone; just me lost in this red desert. Is this to be my ending? Have I lived my life only to die in this insidious red sand, to have my remains blown away by the crimson wind into the red sky? I’ve been shipwrecked on this red planet for forty days. My water pills are almost gone, and I don’t have much time. All that I see around me is red. I look up into the atmosphere at the red sun as it rises in the west and saturates me with its deadly firing death rays, and then sets in the east leaving me all alone shivering in the night with the constant light of the pink moons hovering above me. Oh how I long for the blue, blue sky and the green, green earth.

I remember that fateful day of the wreck, when we lost all power, millions of miles away from home, in this galaxy of the red sun. Our only hope, our only recourse, was to try to make it to this little planet. But our power was gone, we had no control; we wrecked. The crew was dead; the only survivors were First Officer Simkins, who was badly injured, and myself. I did what I could to nurse him, to save him, but he had lost so much blood that he died on the tenth day. His convulsions shook all the remaining blood out of him and he died in the red sand in a pool of his own red blood. So now I am alone, a commander without a command, ship wrecked in this red desert.

As I sit here during these long fourteen hour days I am consumed by my thoughts. I think of my youth, of my school days when I was an art student. We would study colors and their meanings, the symbolic elements of color and how people perceived colors, and how it affected their lives. In retrospect, I can remember that we studied about the color red. I remember that it was the twentieth century arthur Martin Kablo who wrote about the color red in his book: World of Color; an Introduction to the Theory and use of Color in Art. He wrote: “A color such as red can have a wide variety of modes of appearance: it can be solid and opaque like an apple; filmy and atmospheric like a sunset; three dimensional like a goblet of wine; transparent like cellophane; luminous like a traffic light, and dull like sand...” Sand, how ironic.
We learned that red is pre-eminently the color of blood, and the words for red in English, French, German, and Latin all stem from a root which probably meant blood. As a result, red means physical life and energy. On earth maybe, but not here, not this place. I remember that in American superstitions red occurs in many folk cures: a red silk handkerchief for neuralgia, red yarn around the thumb to stop a nosebleed. In China, the color red is a symbol of good luck, and in many cultures it means bloodshed and violence. In ancient Rome, when a victorious general rode in triumph through the streets, his face was painted red. In Irish legend, the most fierce of all warriors were those of the Red Branch, the guards of Conchobar Mac Nessa, King of Ulster in the 1st century A.D.

In a wider sense, red means danger. That is why in the twentieth century traffic lights and stop signs were red. We learned that many of the ideas people principally associate with red are: sexuality (in many cases the red light marked the brothel), temperature (red is a warm color), emotion, force, and action.

But for me red means death. I have only two more water pills and my time grows short. I am lost, I am alone, I am the red desert.
They shoot-
unceasing
i dodge
back and
forth and
back and forth.
-out of the depths
-out to the light
they come
from the dark, murky
omniscient
condenscending
hell,
in a mission to
crush and tenderize my
body into a suitable
meal. Their
yellow eyes, metallic teeth
gnashing-
racing me to
the light i shift-
a new avenue
i run closer to
the cool, black softness.
Fumes burn up my senses
and explode in my head as
i look deep in those
electric eyes.
DEFINITION

by B. J. Warner

Stringing along
a slender line
thinner than a cord
thicker than a thread
twines

along a slender strip
the cord of a bow
a strong of pearls
lies

along a drove of stock
the score
the buttons
a snout inclined
plank edgewise, a
ramp, a sidepiece
strings

a hoax.
I have strived to produce the proud participle, 
groaned over my gerund, 
birthed the exquisite infinitive --

I have shunned the sly semicolon, 
the paralyzing parenthesis, 
the hypocritic hyphen --

I have sheltered my cautious comma --
but

My conjunctions are only subordinate, 
My pronouns are all relative, 

I dangle -- misplaced modifier --
frantic fragment 
dependent clause 

with no element to hang 
on 
from
"This is a spider’s skeleton
I found when I was
cleaning the porch,"
I inform my son,
placing it as carefully
as a Valentine heart
into his cupped hand.
With the bluntness
of honest curiosity
he pokes it, watches it
disintegrate in his fingers;
laughing, he blows
the brittle pieces
as easily as dandelion puffs.
*Dust to dust*, I think,
dreams with no marrow
in the bones.

The difference age makes.
For me what pleases
is a pumpkin’s roundness,
the promise of seed;
for my son at four,
it’s simply the shell,
the jack-o-lantern laugh.
While I see my life at forty
as one more movement
in a whole symphony,
my son just wants
to learn to whistle.
TRICKLING REFLECTION

_by Julie Tullys_

On a stone seat surrounding
I gaze

As rhythmic ripples glide
Through a circle of fallen life

The sun
    turning beads of fountaining water
    into droplets of diamonds

Pleasantly plopping
AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN

by Nadine Slimak

Zack’s parents were out for the evening and he was alone with the sitter. She was downstairs doing her homework while he played in his upstairs bedroom. Soon Zack grew bored and began to look for something to do. He picked out a board game and took it downstairs. The sitter told him they could play “in a little while”. Still bored, Zack went back upstairs. Passing his parents’ bedroom he remembered the gun under their bed.

This gun was kept under the bed for protection. Zack’s father loved his family and wanted them to be safe. In case it was ever needed, he wanted the gun handy. The stainless steel .44 magnum was kept loaded; this gun had no safety latch.

As Zack stepped into the room he thought of the punishment he would receive if he was caught. Zack crossed the room and he heard his father’s voice. “Now Zack,” the voice said, “I will show this to you any time you want to see it, all you have to do is ask. Don’t ever touch it unless I’m with you or you will be punished.”

Zack also heard his own voice answer, “Yes, daddy, I promise.”

Zack thought about his promise and about the punishment. The temptation was too great, the forbidden fruit too close, and the boy reached for the gun.

The sitter had closed her books and was setting up Zack’s game when she heard the gunshot. She was stunned for a moment, then she raced upstairs. She found Zack lying in a pool of his own blood. Thinking quickly, she grabbed a blanket to try and stop the bleeding in his chest. She snatched the phone from the nightstand and called an ambulance.

The sitter rode to the hospital in the ambulance and called Zack’s parents as Zack was rushed into surgery. As Zack’s parents arrived the surgeon was coming from the operating room. “I’m sorry. We did all we could,” he said. There were tears in his eyes as he turned and left the parents to their grief.
Zack’s fate is not an uncommon one. Often the guns kept for protection are the harbingers of destruction to a family. In 1984 alone, 300 children under the age of 15 were killed by a gun kept in their homes. These 300 deaths could have been prevented with a little bit of forethought on the gunowner’s part.

To avoid temptation, guns should be kept out of sight and reach of small children. When a child is old enough he or she should be made aware of the gun and what kind of damage a gun can do. The child must also be taught ‘‘gun safety.’’ This means showing a child the proper way to hold a gun, how to make sure the safety latch is on and also how to check the gun for bullets.

The simplest precaution is to keep guns out of the house. The next option would be to keep the ammunition out of and far away from the gun. Think about Zack’s fate next time you feel the need to protect your family with a gun; after all, you wouldn’t want to see an accident happen, would you?
OBSERVATIONS ON
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
by Mary Newsome

Reason, revelry, generativity, death, loyalty, betrayal: Antony and Cleopatra portrays a dualistic and inconsistent human nature, with destruction as its full-blown conclusion. Shakespeare uses much imagery in his language to consistently call upon this pervasive theme of destruction.

One common dichotomy throughout the play is life guided by Roman principles or revelled in Alexandrian excesses. It is between these two vital forces that Mark Antony is pulled. Roman values are best exemplified by their epitome, Octavius Caesar, a stark man governed by reason. His sister, Octavia, is described as "holy, cold, and still of conversation" (act II, scene vi, lines 122-3). Passion and pleasure illustrate the Egyptian temperament. Its queen, Cleopatra, is Octavia’s perfect opposite. Cleopatra is sensual, lavish, and high-strung; she is the Nile, capable of destruction (as when the Nile is low), and bearing fecundity (as when the Nile is high). Throughout the play, the gravity of Mark Antony and his Roman responsibilities often become lost in the ripe and pleasurable bed of the Nile.

Antony’s duality emerges as a product of his being a necessary element in both of the worlds. The theme of his two-sidedness is set forth in the opening lines of the play, describing him as "The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet’s fool" (I, i, 12-13). Antony’s Roman qualities are ascribed to be his true nature. When he does not display his expected behavior, he is held in low regard or is a failure. This is attributed to being under Cleopatra’s influence. When he rowed after the retreating Cleopatra at the defeat at Actium, thus losing the battle, he afterwards said to her, "O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?...O’er my spirit / [Thy] full supremacy thou know’st" (III, xi, 51,58-9). He admits, "I have fled myself," (III, xi, 7) and his lieutenant-general knows who is to blame,
“Had our general / Been what he knew himself, it had gone well” (III, x, 25-6). The insightful Enobarbus knows that when there is a lessening of reason in Antony, there is an increase of emotion. “And I see still / A diminution in our captain’s brain / Restores his heart” (III, xiii, 196-8). Antony’s admirable qualities are apparent when he can incorporate the two philosophies to establish a sense of equilibrium. The recurrent theme of eating and drinking, usually prompted by Antony after a serious event, lends evidence to this. Embracing suicide as an act of Roman nobility, Antony says to Cleopatra:

I am dying, Egypt, I am dying.
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.
(IV, xv, 41-42)

There are recurrent references to a sexual, survival force interacting with a destructive energy. This idea of eros and thanatos is paramount in Antony’s life for, by it, he is motivated in his two main roles of warrior (Roman) and lover (Egyptian). Antony says, “The next time I do fight, / I’ll make death love me” (III, xiii, 191-2) and “I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into’t / As to a lover’s bed” (IV, xiv, 99-101). This theme is especially emphasized when the character Eros kills himself. Enobarbus speaks of Cleopatra, “I do think / there is a mettle in death, which commits some loving / act upon her (I, ii, 142-4). And, indeed, when Cleopatra dies (by her volition), it is by the generative phallic symbol of the Nile snake.

There are many times throughout the play when the characters are brought to grief or destruction by their own actions, usually ones of betrayal. Antony, at Fulvia’s death, began to miss the one to whom he was unfaithful. The crowd which periodically turned its favor from one ruler to another is doomed to “rot itself with motion” (I, iv, 47). The once loyal Enobarbus, who abandoned Antony and joined the opposing power, killed himself. “Strange it is / That nature must compel us to lament / Our most persisted deeds” (V, i, 28-30) and that these deeds “Strike those that make them” (V, ii, 361).
There are many allusions to the transient quality of the wind as the bearer of destruction, and similar associations with the word ‘blow.’ Pompey’s servant comments on the ground in which the Roman and military relationships are anchored (barren and shallow, compared to the rich and fertile Egyptian soil): ‘Some o’ their plants / are ill rooted already, the least wind i’ th’ world will / blow them down’ (II, vii, 1-3). Scarus utters a curse on Cleopatra, ‘The breeze upon her’ (III, x, 14). ‘Blow’ is used three more times in relation to Cleopatra: as describing her as old, as a means of bringing on her death, and as a side effect of her death.

This play is a study of the multiple, and often, conflicting roles that people assume in acting out their lives. Many can recognize, in modification, the extreme natures of Octavius and Cleopatra in their own behavior. The more the characteristics of reason and emotion are used to complement each other, the more integrated the organism; used as poles between which a person is pulled when fulfilling one role or the other, opposing natures attract destruction.
IMMOBILITY

by Robert Miltner

She never expected life
to be self-serve.
She likes a man around
to look under the hood,
check her oil,
keep her lubricated
and moving smoothly
down the highway.
When her marriage went flat,
she didn’t even know
how to use the jack:
she’ll never forget
how it feels
to ride on the rim.
A MATTER OF TREES

by Brooke Horvath

Sometimes it’s just the sound of words & their positions on the page, read with a quiet violence, leaving a stain behind. As when the weather turned cold and the black walnuts fell, how we gathered them, grandfather and I, our fingers dyed brown and browner, how one time we entered a field the theme of which was sheep, some dead (some dog) some not. It was upon the dead the accent fell, the magical horror—a matter of trees and the windy silence like the sound of Ohs and the odd positioning of bodies, like the exact word in the right place, each walnut in its place, its place the grass, now the basket, bringing them home for squirrels to winter on. Buried them mostly, the squirrel did, as farmers their sheep—or whatever farmers do with sheep the dog has ravaged, leaving their eyes like blank verse, the dog returning later to the field to scan a line of scarecrow trees.
VENICE

by Brooke Horvath

I wish I could have been the one
to take her order,
to deliver on a silver tray the iced coffee
she now stirs with a slow spoon,
though I would settle for being the cold April wind
across the Piazza San Marco
that turns her jacket collar up
and fans her hair about her face.
She doesn’t mind, notices the wind
less than the waiter,
no more than her downcast eyes
the tourists, pigeons, louring sky.

No one else sits outdoors today
before the storied Florian,
whose Martini chairs and tables drift
in a stone sea behind her
with the ghosts of Byron and Henry James
(who would, I think, enjoy her,
each, of course, in his own way).

A copy of the Herald Tribune lies folded
in the chair beside her.
Perhaps she follows a ball club
somewhere in the American midwest,
or owns stock, or has a concern for Aldo Moro.
Possibly, she desires only
the shape of her own words,
the voices they recall.
She sips her coffee,
thumbs a Michelin Green Guide
I would give anything to be
for the chance to describe for her
Titian madonnas and old monasteries,
to direct her through the twisted street
that all lead to where she sits,
to tell her stories of the Bridge of Sighs
(though again, I'd more than settle
for being her glass of iced coffee,
or her wind-tossed jacket, or that long, dark hair
seeking the attention of her downcast eyes).
ONE SMALL BURST
by Lora Pugh

Looking out my window, I saw it was raining. So gray and wet, it was unlike the day before, when the sun was shining brightly in the sky. It seemed mother nature was telling me something. As I pressed my face to the window, I felt the cold seeping in; what a day to start back to school after eighteen years!

What if I fail? What if I’ve made a mistake? I never liked high school; what made me think I’d like college? This time must be different; I want to make a good life for my sons. I had to get my mind set on this.

I walked down the stairs to get the coffee started. The aroma of fresh coffee filled my nose. I watched the water bubble up in the pot. The water darkened with each pop. The bubbles were bursting faster, so fast I couldn’t tell when one bubble broke and a new one began. I wondered if that’s how confidence is built. It starts out weak and clear, then with each new successful step it gets stronger and stronger.

I sat at the table holding my cup in my hands to warm them; it helped. Once my hands were warm, what was I to do about that cold, weird feeling in the pit of my stomach? As I sipped my cooling coffee, feeling grayer than the world outside, I wondered, will I make good grades?

Knowing that my sons were up, I waited to hear the familiar clomp, clomp, clomp on the stairs. I looked up from my coffee to stare at them. My one son said, “Well, this is the big day Mom. I want you to bring home A’s.”

I went to school with butterflies in my stomach, with this question in my mind: is this really happening to me? I will do this like I do everything, one small “burst” at a time.
CANON

by Kristin Wheeland

Predestined,
ordained-
elected-
something like that.
a holy shroud in a glass case,
Big wet tears from an onion hanky,
a compulsive liar, healed
tells the truth
to a crowd of open-
pursed
Byzantine
dreamers.

GOSSIPMONGER

by Kristin Wheeland

Vultures circle,
glinting, gleaming steel eyes,
diving
pecking
at someone else’s carcass.
“LOOK WHAT WE’VE DONE TO OLD BUGS, MA”

by Joan Houghton

Remember being a kid? And sleeping late on Saturday morning? Then curling up to watch cartoons? The innocence of such a scene is about as American as Mom and apple pie. How could anyone object to a few lazy hours of Bugs Bunny? Perhaps Bugs should! As obvious as it may seem, it appears forgotten that rabbits don’t walk on two legs; they don’t pack luggage to go on vacation; they don’t ask “What’s up, Doc?” Yet day in and day out, animal images flash across luminescent screens performing acts that scientists would be hard-pressed to observe anywhere, especially in the animal kingdom. As evidenced by a typical week of television programming, Americans alienate themselves from nature by frequently portraying animals as fictional creatures.

Fictional animals are depicted as bipedal, English-speaking creatures with human concerns. Even the most casual flip through the dial indicates how we have humanized animals on television. Whether caricatured muppets or cartoon creations, TV animals walk and talk. We have chipmunks that sing and dress like Don Johnson; koalas that sail boats and ride skate boards; piglets that play with bears; birds that beat up cats. They have nauseating little names like Kissyfur and Gummi Bear. And while not every animal portrayed walks and talks, the exception is rare. The Pinwheel turtle lives in a marionette shell sans legs. Elephant of “The Elephant Show” never speaks, but I’ve seen her dance in a tutu as “Cinder-Elephant.”

I know it’s Mickey Mouse’s 60th birthday, and we should have respect for our elders, but how many mice have you seen on two legs? Mine all scurry on scritchy little paws in the darkened netherworlds behind the walls. Perhaps I should turn on the lights and cameras and yell “ACTION!” Maybe my mice will line up to sing and dance, or at the very least, battle me face to face, instead of leaving their tiny black calling cards wherever they find crumbs.
It is the frequency with which we practice this particular type of "human chauvinism" that is alarming. Information from a HAKCAI (Houghton and Kids Can't Afford to Inc.) survey of television programming for the week of September 24th to 30th provides the following factoids. Excluding premium channels, there are 5208 viewing hours in a week. When you drop channel days in which a station shows no programs specifically related to animals, there are 1464 possible program hours to alienate or educate the viewing public about animals. Of these, 234 are used.

Before we tackle the hard data, it should be noted that HAKCAI has not been granted certified "couch potato" status. This left 57 viewing hours in question. Will Mr. Wizard do an animal segment any day this week? Does Ramona, listed simply as "children", include animals of any sort? In the interest of fairness, we'll throw out the 10 hours only suspected of being Animal Subversive. We'll give Animal Natural every benefit of the doubt and credit it with 19 hours of shows that are unknown. We'll further throw in the 28 hours considered to be of a questionable nature by assuming that Mr. Wizard will run an animal segment every day: that documentaries of Australia will comment on the kangaroos; that there is something to be learned about aquatic life by watching "Fishing with Kastaway Kulis."

It should further be noted that this survey refused to comment on hallowed institutes of the "Lassie" and "Rin Tin Tin" genre. Shows portraying live animals as pets or heroes were not included in any statistic with one glaring exception. A horse is a horse, of course, of course... that is of course unless the horse is the famous Mr. Ed. Animal Subversive? You betcha!

None the less, the factoids emerge... even giving Animal Natural every favorable balance, Animal Subversive wins by a landslide. Programs that show animals as man-made creations rack up 146 hours per week to 78 hours of animals in nature. Of the 15 stations that offer animal caricature shows, only 5 offer certifiable time to animal informative shows. Of the 6 stations that show definitive nature studies, 4 also offer programming for those that like their animals well-versed in cosmetology and fashion. Consider the feature movies
on premium channels... the Christmas specials... the factors that multiply when you add a VCR to your set... on second thought, Don’t! The sad fact remains: Americans view TV animals through their own bias perspective a minimum of 2 to 1.

One could argue that we do all this animal fluff because we love nature. But to love something necessarily implies accepting the object of love on its own terms. If one can grasp that condition of love, it appears that humans, by creating animals in their own image, are expressing self-love. The very essence of the act is one of man’s domination. Each puppet or cartoon is CREATED by an artist. It is a human who controls each movement, leaving us with the impression that man can, in fact, dominate nature, rather than accept his position in it. In everyday conversation we don’t even bother to acknowledge that we are discussing a cartoon bear or a muppet frog. Ask a small child. Long before they reach school age, they can tell you. Pooh IS a bear. Kermit IS a frog.

Opportunity cost, in its most basic terms, says that if you spend your money on one thing, it will not be available to spend on something else. If we borrow this theory from economics, we find that our man-made creations alienate us from nature by simply not allowing time to learn about animals as they exist in their own worlds. If we do not choose to become knowledgeable, the proliferation of our human-imposed images becomes an accepted reality.

So, dear reader, sleep late next Saturday morning to recapture your youth. Then pull on your sweats and take a walk in the woods. And if, per chance, you wander upon a rabbit who turns to you and says “What’s up, Doc?” be grateful you spent all of those hours in front of the tube. Personally, I’d faint.
I heard a voice on the stairway calling out: "I’ll be downstairs in the basement."

That’s where I’ve lived all my lives -- not as far as the cellar, just downstairs.

At ten I built model rockets and painted them with dreams, underneath the stairs.

My mother said she had her office there With a telephone extension just above the washer.

At sixteen I studied physics in a bare bulb’s glare On a cardtable in the quiet, tracing trajectories.

At twenty we made love on the old discarded mattresses Thinking noone knew that we were under all their cares.

At thirty I set my door across the filecabinets and traced a dissertation across the same bulb’s glare.

At forty we installed a telephone above the dryer So I could call from below the laundry chute.

And now I hear a voice coming down to my downstairs. Please, it isn’t time for my daughter to come down the basement stairs.
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