

Altar Call

Ranting shepherd
smiling sheep

Sodomy Sodomize Sodomites

wooden pews
pointed stakes
dogma spewed in August heat

Burn them!

from Leviticus
from Romans
from a sermon praised in seminary

It's in the Bible

Confederate flags
the Body of Christ
grape juice spilled on Sunday ties
hoarse and needing more

They want your little boys

hands raised
tears shed
a final hymn
no spit left

*Thou bidst me to come
just as I am*

starched collar
bloody knees
I leave before they finish—

unforgiven and
unforgiving.

Red Shoelaces in the Bible Belt

Walking along the waterfront
afraid of holding hands,
thankful that humid air
doesn't dampen giddy hopes,
choosing phrases to
flatter and impress—

unchaperoned
our words
echo past a billboard Genesis:

*Therefore shall a man cleave unto his wife
and be one flesh*

leading us to my Spartan camp

a bedless barrack,
milk crates, books, dust gathered in
darkened corners

where you touch the faded skin
above my thin-boned wrist
the spot that's usually hidden by a
southpaw watch.

We're lefties
lost in the rightwing South,
drinking Winn-Dixie tonic
blue-lawed without the gin,
encouraging red-laced sneakers and
thrift-store loafers
to flirt beneath a makeshift table.

It's raining when we finally kiss,
distant thunder in our ears.

Having Drinks at the Poinsett Hotel

1.

Carolina's finest hotel leading a
Southern Living life

dimmed and shuttered,
then revived with face-lift fanfare—

overstuffed chairs, pecan paneling,
wireless internet

the façade of former glory
bragging about *flamboyant* guests
(*Liberace was our best*)

welcoming Carpetbaggers on
liberal terms

securing a lasting peace by
fixing leaks.

2.

When we're finished with our drinks
my mother takes your hand

her outworn attitudes long-since
tossed aside

forgetting she was dimmed and
shuttered

then revived.

Sands of Kitty Hawk

1.

We imagined a Grecian war along
this tar-heeled shore
reenacting midday moments
from Homer's Song of Ilium:

Achilles and Patroclus
forever young
removing armor with
heated haste
parching tongues suddenly
ablaze
lovers posing for a
painted vase.

Evening pelicans woke us from our
sweat-entangled sleep
and as we climbed to higher ground
two women
weathered and lined
wandered across our salt-spray path
speaking in silent tongues and
knowing eyes
their dovetailed devotion inspiring
the vow we took
to walk this beach again

you and I gray with age.

2.

But death has severed the *you* from *us*
shedding blood and myths of innocence

leaving me alone
to mourn the sands of Kitty Hawk

a widow's walk amid the crashing waves.

Once Before

Hawksbill Creek counts cold December nights,
rushing along winter-berry banks until it reaches Christmas Eve,
listening to hard-shell Baptists sing their self-assuring hymns,
antebellum voices rising above this vanquished valley,
a Confederate cache of tin-type tales,
overwrought epics worshipping the over-praised past,
accompanied by the scene that hangs in my cheap motel,
a pitiful painting honoring the barefoot boys
who died to save the milk-white caste of their Scotch-Irish skin,
the desk clerk resurrecting the long-lost Cause,
reserving her righteous cant for Mexicans, welfare, and *all them gays*,
telling an empty lobby *We've been invaded once before*—
and as I leave the town on New Year's Day,
driving past signs with floating sombreros,
I give one last wink to my favorite pigeon-stained statue:
a Civil War general who died a bachelor.