

*We will still need some songs, speeches, interpretive
dances; we enslaved, our clean rebellious bones, will rise.*

That Kind OF CHANGE

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Poetry-only edition edited by C. Campbell
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Tomorrow was too late to arm yourself.
—Nikki Giovanni

A note on technique:

When Congress passed the Violent Radicalization and Home-grown Terror act in 2007, I totally lost my shit and wrote an eight page long polemical poem with the same title as the act. It was a wonderfully cathartic exercise, but I could clearly see that the resulting text was not worth anything, really. Not able ever to toss anything out, I kept it around, until I discovered The Cut Up Engine, a lovely website which automatically slices and randomizes texts. So, into the blender when the poem—and some interesting things began to happen with the output. Then it occurred to me that this crappy poem I wrote could be mixed up with anything, and the fun really started.

So I mixed it with the 2008 State of the Union Speech, the Black Bloc Papers, President Obama's nomination acceptance speech, Zapatista leader Sup Marcos' writings, the text of the Violent Radicalization act itself, an essay by Voltairine DeCleyre. Then the voices began to come out.

I wound up with a disjointed poetic diary in the voices of people who lived in a future world. While the poems are no more an accurate prediction than any other science fiction story, I found in the voices a warning of what could happen to us as those in power try to continue on with luxury as usual as the world's resources and patience dry up.

On the other hand, the poems are not a manifesto, or recommendation for action, or a hope for the future. Though the collapse of the corporate petroligarchy is often the starting point for Utopian and Dystopian dreamers, I doubt that such a collapse would result in anything other than violent warlordism and starvation. That a figure like John Sweeny would arise and found an egalitarian autonomous community in such an atmosphere of scarcity and violence is one chance in a million. Which is why, of course, the community he founds in named Chance.

I could have, and may still, reform this story into a novel of sorts, but for now, these poetic fragments paint an impressionistic picture of a future that seems less like science fiction every time I watch the news.

September, 2010

*In every broadcast gun, every machine work and sacrifice,
They said, "The market will fix it."
the worn-out ideas and the cynicism—*

And hungry babies' eyes.

Autonomy—because we rise up—our decision will be a Real Grip.

We who traveled the farthest, and the young, you are on your own.

Teach someone—

What—

what is—

I'll invest in dreams deferred.

INTRODUCTION

I admit that when I was asked to provide scholarly commentary on the newly-discovered poems by the near-mythical figure of John Sweeny and his contemporaries, I was intimidated. The texts that comprise this volume were discovered in a remarkably well-preserved foundation by Atlanta Autonomous University's Nathaniel Bateman's recent archaeological dig in the desert southwest. The site has been authenticated as being the original village of Chance, the first Autonomous Community of the Federation, and, as any student of our history knows, the last resting place of John Sweeny and home of many other prominent figures in the Change War. I am greatly indebted to Buffalo Autonomous University's Abdul Rahman for his tireless work collecting historical references and documents to corroborate my findings. His knowledge of antique data storage systems and dexterity in ferreting out the ephemeral news stories of the past has been immeasurably helpful. Further documentation of his research is available through the BAU archives. I have elected not to include his references in this text out of respect for space and aesthetics.

Poetically speaking, these texts are in the ironic, short-burst telegraphic style that was prevalent during and just after the Change War. Individuals would often record their impressions of events in poems addressed to friends, sometimes divided into multiple sections. These poems would then be collected into volumes some years later, when most of the correspondents had died. There are many examples of these collections extant, the most influential being A. Joron's "Enigmatic Glowing," which is the collected meditations of a small religious community in the Cascade Mountains, edited and annotated by that venerable poet of the early 21st century. The primary purpose of these collections was to provide the descendants of the writers with a clear and multidimensional view of the authors' lives.

It is assumed that the collector and editor of these poems was Rui-ma Velazquez, the daughter of Sweeny and his long-time partner, Nikki Velazquez.

In this edition, the presumed speaker in each poem will be placed at the head of the poem. Traditionally, the speakers' names are left off, in an attempt to express the lived totality of the co-authors' experience, rather than creating an indelible monument to one person's egoistic experience of events.

Out of great respect for the authors and the quality of their work, this edition has been made available without my commentary.

C. Campbell
Buffalo Autonomous University,
November 2179

4.

*Surely we can agree to cast off the known hunger,
the great radicalizer.*

*You know my story, saw its outcome go up in flames,
the kids crying, then those sound women planting rows of beans,*

*Nikki, Ruima—many Others,
We, responsible for ourselves,
the path that would feed us if we demand it,*

*Once it happens,
one begins to see that sickness and delusion won't happen—
in our land the executed executive sprouted mothers.*

5.

*Now, I don't believe the Owners' patriotisms:
when men still re-enlist after losing a limb or hand to terror.*

Fire, drawing breath into turmoil—

I will listen just by talking tough—

*The young people voted here because we loved what they wanted—
the freedom-owners thrown.*

*If they ride into town—cut them if they reach for us.
We've bruises, scrapes, and a country more decent,*

thanks to the historic slate.

6.

*keep America's promise (APPLAUSE) and delusion—
it has mashed in our troops—it's this one, the Change War,*

the war for the coming heart, for those who got that chance.

*—listen now—
we are here.*

*the little channels that are nothing,
a little channel runs to each young student, alone.*

Sweeny's DEATH SPEECH

1.

*Young people end our dependence—you know hunger, you know exchange,
You understand these challenges, the way the world could see you—*

our greatest inheritance.

*I asked for the tactics of terrorism, to do what was necessary,
that war— it was time for steel.*

*We have, we keep,
in the 21st century,*

Autonomy.

2.

*People should run from the news—the flat footed child, compliant,
was lost.*

I teach for the coming something.

3.

*Because the killers—the members of Congress—
had to debate what to say to the people,*

*who signed up the ramp,
who were hungry,
who were China-bound slaves,*

*fingering the idiotic, the corroded journey—
the credit cards, bills they just couldn't—*

Those who owned debt in America quieted us into open, armed love.

Nikki, THE MOTHER

1.

*Where was the eye of the media? It scared me,
But he needed more.
He, like most, getting militant, used direct action tactics.*

*We went where we wanted,
breaking windows and ideals—
In the corrupt society, there was less warmth
at what was (considered) violent.
He broke a window, in the US, in Los Angeles.
The Freedom Riders, turning their faces to this,
gave themselves up,
declared him off limits.*

*From that one executed executive
sprouted the fists of our corrupt society.
What it took to really change faces,
break windows, or enrich his distance.
Having a rough day, Ruima, cost us our practice.*

2.

*Then they sell their lives, these folks.
We believed in the world, eternal rock.
He determined to take what he needed,
there was no ramp that month—no lines, or tree sits.
Later, he reached out from his loosely affiliated crew,
your father, commander of the six o'clock news.*

And I saw a revolution.

3.

*This time, innovative strategies
become bumperstickers, buttons, patches.
He imagined a society where “the left”
gnawed stones and waited for the Second Coming.
His belief was that most men
were ideologically unsound and twisted.*

*We anarchists were the militant echo chamber.
Needs were taken care of with a Smith and Wesson.
The bricks were thrown by protesters in the night.
My existence bent in his direction,
toward the biceps of his protest.
Trying to gain use of the land,
poor countries rose in revolution,
soon the whole fairy tale
was in our bones, in hunger, death,
And he eyed Los Angeles with jealousy.*

4.

*The Diggers and Wesson blessing:
Liberty for all, where we work.
His cement moment, two big undercovers
trying to pull people on TV,
he saw them waving that stupid, limp protester.
That, to him, was the big war.*

*He went pariah,
face down on the cement,
raging at the civil rights,
the anti-war that may have never come.*

*Simple: did breaking a window
place him on the side of the dead?
He'd been attacking cops.
I was accepting;
our folks got farms
if we brought enough rags and fire.*

5.

At protests I was told I was waving a lost, good thing.

*Flat
dry red
earth.
Who we are.*

*Wet, hearing myself and my illegal broadcasting, I feel relieved.
I don't just want ash.
I believe.*

12.

*I don't quite remember, but just a few weeks prior to this war,
a glorious peace was called.*

*We see their work: a thirst for profits.
For the commoners, the wretched, the president,
the news shows broadcast relieved sighs.*

We remain silent in the face of the sky falling.

The truth is now we have the only honorable home.

13.

*Once, our paramilitary groups offered the impossible mirror,
the Segundo Piso, the bullet indigenous, Mexican, and American.*

*Whether we take back the guerrillero's dreams/nightmares,
we'll come to the dinner table when our indigenous land is liberated,*

*We say that we reject the whole catalogue of arguments.
Without shame.*

*Despite the meddling risings of the fascists and Franco,
I see that Elena was my repudiation, my wedge—*

*emerging from exile, conscientious,
I am breaking the ties.*

14.

*The sky falls.
The same problem:*

I don't know the world.

*Old hippy labels like “intolerant”, “Stalinist”, the same fundamentalism.
The mountains of objection in your letters.
The soldiers, to escape, say I am wrong,*

but I am every honest candidate!

8.

*At Guadalajara, scribbling sketches, odd phrases, in the halls.
To destroy/depopulate lands, to rebuild/reorder the notebook of dreams,*

I stay.

*In sneakers, flip-flops, we are stewards, I believe.
It means open free water, confronting the hubris
of those who own the planet,
the neoliberal destruction of humanity.*

*The one concise principle of the indigenous;
harassed, eager for handouts and pity,*

we have arrived, the disappeared and the dead.

9.

*The fragile transience of food,
not a crumb of freedom when we will not sell ourselves,
our dead, our hospitals, churches, our burned buildings.*

*We are the ones who slowly look, and become hard.
The Commission lacks intelligence, they will die.*

*It occurs that the political players are shameless.
Below them, we shadows, curled up but never dead,
the kind that the owners don't give a damn about,
without any boots, are worn-out.*

10.

*Enforced, embodied, the war had ended?
Even now, with all of this peace,*

*a less regular army sells the illustrious true word:
Resist!*

11.

She never said so openly, but leave for us the secrets I told her.

Quima, THE DAUGHTER

1.

*You and your history—
a fine distinction when you had members of Congress.
Father was wounded by their faces.
He was surrounded by the members of their extremism.
He'd said, “We need the land, and how long a time do we have?”
Better luck wasn't what he listened to.*

*If our children look to history,
they see the food just stopped—
the stupid slogans rolled up
against the buffoons' consumption.*

*Over the next decade,
the fairy tale we hungered for was crushed hard.
As Father marched east,
it seemed his eyes squinted into the distance.
And that dust changed nothing.*

2.

*Mother, respect your traditions.
Meetings, discussions, cantonments.
Warmer places than the steam vents.*

*He despised “freedom,” despised America,
and aimed at the head,
and was not
the real killer.*

*He saw it was too late to properly arm himself.
Hospitals, churches, burned buildings—
he begged for it all.*

*Let us find a man, give him simple corn and liberty.
We've seen citizens can begin to rejoin the all.
All we need is the force to protect each other.*

*In an instant, "could be" can begin.
And the sky fell.*

3.

*We were the women in the night, with increased rage.
Continue to develop, and you have your freedom.*

Our message—to listen.

This site we will defend with spade and scythe.

4.

*We make you a solemn pledge:
to the red land of the desert,
our bones in clothes,
to defend our vital interests
against that confronting hand.*

5.

*We've seen what was needed and now finger,
idiotic, corroded fire on the wide sea.*

Drawing breath.

6.

*Our reconstruction,
our soft technology,
our steps.*

*Because stones think,
the world believed we deserved famine.*

*Mother, let us come to finally take it away.
we witnessed stirring moments wherever freedom
advanced the jubilant Smith and Wesson dream of the children,
urban barricades for some,
to defend our land when the commander in chief of our poisons burst.*

*The history of liberty.
We've seen arresting officer's negotiations,
the protests, read the novels.
We have reviewed our strategy,
and People of the Chance will choose a future,
and come clean.*

3.

In our principles, or in our hells.

The way is real—hunger is not some intellectual's discernment.

4.

*Whether or not she saved me in the Mexican Southeast,
she and I were on the street; it became apparent our dead
were half-eaten.*

*Confusion and fear, and hostility towards the politicians,
were all it took.*

*We were worthy of a more serious lot
These, our kisses denied, became an assembly of disagreement.*

*Opposed to having democracy eaten up, I asked,
anticipating Elena's explanation that we share, like some self-help book,
the international body.*

5.

*And she disappeared.
Ah! Finally, the legal dirty business,
the judicial circus, this city
in foreign debt tried me for murder!*

*It wasn't her who silently applauded the repression,
she who had been sitting in a reflection.*

6.

*I take delight in each letter from Chance,
but Nikki's shadow was not a national sovereignty.*

I am abandoned. A have-not.

*The River Commission is selling an illustrious "retirement" for me,
remaking my voice, cultivating the science,*

and the speed of dreams.

7.

I'm not going to slowly, or quickly, lose the real rebellion.

Sweeny:

A COMMUNIQUE FROM THE DESERT

1.

*From the desert of the American Southwest to the world!
From the free community of Chance
to many other communities united in struggle!*

*Some believed that such an effort would
save their own Continent, Planet Earth.
To those who word and worm among the powerful,
those ones who sigh and leave us,
we do not surrender!*

*Resist! Do not let the "nation model"
rule the land of morals.
In their thin skins,
which critics and advisors say change is enough?*

Resist! Contravene the cries of those who command!

Convince me not to surrender! Resist!

Do not bow to international greed!

2.

*Conscientious, the patriot was denied. The Death Eyes squinted.
All were besieged: more alternatives for humanity,
we need more campaigns!*

*In my letters, basic pose, to say anything, but be quite fierce.
Hastening uncertainty, the theoretical analyses.*

*We didn't just face the Army of the South.
We communicate with smoke signals.*

*However, it may be that we are that Other:
to love that which is nothing that we are.*

*Or else, sickness,
the River wants all of it—
and is training militia groups.
And our children look to short lives
and do nothing, nothing.*

Sweeny:

A HISTORY OF THE CHANGE WAR

1.

*The man with three kids (Me) reached the hunger years,
the terror of rutting mouths; the living small, then the fall.*

*And that old earnest hippy claptrap seemed foolish as our poisons burst—
with these simple and quick deaths, luck was what said “fuck it.”*

*The Diggers, we felled the megaphones, blood bags, backboards and tasers.
We loved something, and nothing happened.*

*Finally, our fracture—bone survivalist militia minions,
without land rights—carefully planned, honed and timed—*

We raged so carefully,

Revolution was our dinner table.

2.

*River Commission wanted us, it drove us forward—People, guttered or
buried.*

Stages, open and twisted metal and killed for.

I was given to touch someone.

*We were levelers, diggers, exploders with oiled rags and fire.
we were muzzled, cramped, chafed, in the irrigated desert, California and
Texas.*

*In Philly, the homeless had built something of the rust-through on the
steam vents, underground—their rage, the blood bags burst, the ghosts
marched.*

*After they were hauled off, we burned the building.
Those clowns were traditional about being tolerant—we fools killed.*

*When their dreams were really dead—our mobility became that distance—
our detachment.*

*Two teams would be erased, disappeared.
This was a rebel territory, and a clumsy intruder would be creased.*

*I didn't believe their simple terms, as they flailed about,
solving the unknown in the skin and bone they hadn't yet taken off.*

*They, the same ones of life's government, in charge again.
I ran from the mountains in a shadow of a doubt,*

*What is intelligent offends by selling itself out,
the impossible geometry of our times, not shined.*

4.

It was the guerrero for me, and I acted.

Long gone provocateurs, we loaded up to learn about path of death.

Why? Because of you, Ruima?

*Well, with us, here at the table, well, you already understand,
now in the Communities.*

It was a laboratory for a rougher day,

Latin America, in Zapatista hands.

Sweeny:

DEDICATION OF THE STRUGGLE IN LATIN AMERICA

1.

*The stitching was coming out and,
looking back at Nikki, I went to save the Other.*

*We are willing, from another country.
The resistance the same; the ethanol corn.*

*Rolando, the insurgent medical lieutenant,
respected his ancestors, and cared for them with a fragile crystal arm.*

*I asked him, one cloud to another,
if the guerrero should dedicate his struggle, or become a faraway recluse.*

He responded, "We are... Always are we so Given."

*We saw the boots of waste and of violence, of death.
Beset by the den of thieves in the Mexico of that day,*

*Rolando wanted Her fortunate vision,
what it took to be a woman,*

*mashed in without papers,
without coasts.*

2.

*The Luddite mountains of Mexico tell you to go home.
Rolando had no price.*

*The politics, the wide, beautiful lesson in contemporary nationalism,
the fundamental problem remains:*

Rolando's government had made a chaotic reordering of the ruins of his face.

3.

*The promise,
the sign,
as Zapatistas,
we didn't know.*

3.

What we needed was radical—a fairy tale that would be each person's alone.

To use the land.

*As the owner reached into his pocket, with a smug smirk,
we triggered something.*

*Up the exit ramp this month—the ethanol corn, if some would just listen,
was the gravest of errors.*

Nothing we built survived.

4.

*This happened as people begged—the act was like revolution—
But mine was serious business, revenge—not a prophet,*

*at root I was a "terrorist"—so count the human cost:
murder and slaughter ruled—years, and years, some with courage—
and so many of the owners died at my hand.*

And the world, in an ideology shared, saw square-on the stolen land.

5.

*all our eyes saw shreds of sense, and we felt the need was radical—
to root out discourse and words, the fascists and Franco and Ford,*

and each other.

And my Smith and Wesson blessing was the given sign.

6.

*Bombs were blown, not even a hair of fear when they came to take it—
at thirty dollars per gallon—the whole town's got a filthy right to eat.*

*And the whole town said "go," chucked the truth of change—flat pariahs,
not prophets, but loaded, fully noncompliant.*

With the stronger hand, we survived intact.

7.

*We will still need some songs, speeches, interpretive dances;
we enslaved, our clean rebellious bones, will rise.*

*A dirty technology using little burr hook stickers
to hitch a ride on the collapse—*

*Luck, the mother of chances lost,
the posies, the ashes, ashes.*

8.

*Hidden under a tarp with the minority leader of the Senate:
I saw a rust-through of my delusions, and their professional qualifications.*

*The Commission elected, and retreated,
blessing the invisible fist as it appeared.*

*I was a machine for killing. The biceps of good hard fighting
called the shots.*

9.

First the Capitol Mall, then the fall.

*The world, the eternal rock of the Senate; and Federal Agencies—
the River wanted, needed, levelers, diggers, exploders,
a Chair and a Vice for this kind of hungry scrape.*

*And I was identified by the Chairman
of the ranking minority for rapid social change.*

*Appointed by the individual members, my homegrown terrorism (and 10
others')
were appointed for the revolution.*

Every technologic destiny of the children died.

*It died.
That kind of change.*

10.

*It was the evil kind of hungry made the River necessary.
The balance point took its time—*

our last want, though, was to advance political Representatives.

The muscle of what sets you seething—you distrust.

You're pariah, when it comes to that,

8.

*So chances lost—the past,
fire for the ethanol farm owners' thugs.
Free is anywhere a gun bursts,
Free is munitions and acreage—
these will gun the machine down—
homegrown, this the rust-through of their food chains.*

*The echo chamber,
that relentless dictionary of speaking souls
The desert and stomachs of those who have childhood ashes—
fear in their bones, and eyes.*

9.

*Her machete blade calls!
Fingers in the dirt—*

*Take what Sweeny did not!
The kind of world he envisioned,
premature centuries—
the grave of the Mother of Chances—
and her lost signs regained,
every single one.*

*our family, a tiny speck.
a spark.*

*Better luck next time.
Better blood for discussions—
use the land as a channel,
our hands breathed the disease, finally.*

*In his heartless chest he raged at revenge—
the owners toned up slogans as the sky's bus fell.*

5.

*In the seventh and bleakest year—
in the distance, Warplane wings,
and we, the poems, the protests, the novels,
our abraded skin, the relentless travel,
again, we waited for the wind to point.*

6.

*It takes fear—the tighten-up,
the real killers—it's true—
to radicalize the eyes and ears of the prepared—*

*They reach into their heartless chests;
we breathe, and finally, we eat the toxics.*

*We left several men dead.
I commanded the lane I needed.*

7.

*Our own learning of famine to blame
Oh, but how this violence radicalizes,
having defended "democracy" once,
the rooting radicals in their graves gave us something to teach.
the cramped, chafed shovel and the seeds and sweat.*

*Leaping from a burning building—the radiator of despair—
and the whole bloodwashed bedside tale we are told as children—*

*to be had,
and to be happy.*

A glint waits for just-hearted souls.

*not a man who is given the hand
he reaches out for.*

11.

*I conducted the commander in chief to the machine,
and we remember he was destined to be an axis of glory and terrorism.*

*Anyone can out his stupid slogans—And the fat stomachs of those who owned,
and the sweat, and the regulations, and the Executive Orders that radicalized
the unaffiliated "terrorists."*

So, not limited to behavioral science this time—

a revolution.

12.

So we fought him.

His executive orders governed the belief system.

*I stopped waving that stupid flag,
a simpler hunger was crushed into terrorism.*

*We wore down those "betters" whose arrogance, born, raised,
and commissioned, considered important every broadcast saying "mine."*

*I stopped waving and plugged those Chairmen of the Committee,
those "betters," those who had made me.*

13.

*We felt the right people were finally hungry in the United States.
For we felt a need for homegrown terrorism in our funny likes and dislikes.*

*The liberals marching signs were impossible.
The River Commission was the sole basis of our metal.
They had the dirt and the base violence.*

*In the irrigated desert,
we "homegrown terrorists,"
ideologically debased,
fight for these others,
these locals,
in the end,
for a tribal homeland.*

We were a kill system for the Federal Agency.

Tomorrow was too late.

14.

*Certain governments, including the stones,
thought the United States should not stay united.*

In liberty and belief, they voted and pocketed the wrong terrorism.

Nikki, DURING THE WAR

1.

*Before the war it was true—
those who owned were debased at bedsides,
in snickering wealth.*

*Then, we partied our last—
and that did nothing.
The cars got small, then the fall—
scythes and tears and brass casings,
and no food trucks.*

2.

*Then the barricades of some romantic rebellion,
the open free water, lock and load, the reign of fists,
the terror—
those who squint flat with furious faces.*

*The feds wouldn't save our filthy,
half-eaten grandchildren's children,
so we farmed back of these few fields—
one someplace of many.*

*Fractures—bone splinters, skulled fascists
and the Franco and Ford of our poisons,
the soldiers' flesh.*

*I sit now with championed men—
we have many.*

3.

*The Diggers had it down—
homegrown, patches, graffiti,
careful trade, open free water.*

*Sweeny? Once he'd killed, reached the balance point,
he began to lead these children of waste and rape,*