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# Queer and Present Danger

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## Queer and Present Danger

Madeleine Guekguezian

(Queer Variations on National Themes;  
Dedicated to Katharine Lee, Allen, Walt,  
Aaron, Silviana, and Marsha)

America has a place on our queer alphabet,  
An identity hidden and implied,  
A nation based on Q: Questioning.  
America! Sing America!

From the vantage of purple mountains marching on the edges  
of a collective conscience  
Sings, in persistent polyphony, a people haunted by a why  
of themselves.  
On half cadences boldly, triumphantly uncertain in a mass-  
chorus America raises to God  
And neighbor— to anyone, anywhere who will listen—  
the question “What does it mean to be American?”  
We trek across the vastness between shining seas, a journey

without a roadmap occupied by questions, by the  
answers they dance around.

And, America, I feel lost in you— as you—  
striving against waves of voices saying  
they are certain who you are  
Voices forgetting that our national anthem  
ends on a question  
Forgetting that we are strangers striving to mend  
our every flaw together

Voices so chaotic that I hate you and hate myself and  
who I am and that I can't help but be who I am!

America, they tell who I have to be.

America, only I can tell me who I am.

America, what I am is bound for change  
and uncertainty and lingering questions

Like you, surely, like you.

To learn America is to sing myself and assume those around me.

Adaptive to the course of the world like an ocean-vessel  
Like an ocean-vessel keeps itself afloat.  
How can we be when so much of your body-choral  
electric tends to the nonconductive,  
sings “this is only who we are”?  
How can something as massive as you, who reaches  
to heaven with the fingertips of Appalachia and Sierra and  
Rocky and Ozark  
extending from the open prairies  
be constrained as if packed storage-tight for a dusty closet to  
be forgotten  
Or to manifest in only one sort of way?  
That an essential American exists who is the answer to the  
question of ourselves.  
That an English-fumbling tongue born elsewhere  
cannot sing the joy and sorrow of America or be within the  
body of this nation  
Like a trans woman cannot be either if she didn’t play with dolls

as a child or want an essential if-and-only-if  
transitioned version of herself.

America, your manifold self and all its indefinites are  
“fire in a crowded theater” in too many hearts.  
America, sometimes my questions become so many that doubt  
manifests hatred. Yet—  
America, it is in your nature to be doubted and it is  
your truth—  
even though it may be painful and confounding—  
America, do not forget those who sing your question  
and your change.

The prevailing question of you essayed in art and action  
Is a performance in changing costume and with fractals  
of truth.

We are kings, queens, and in-between in those refractions of  
the light cast

In rays of difficult questions and answers more difficult.  
America, don't listen when "the rest is drag" is dismissed as a lie  
by the nature of performance.  
America, performance is a means of searching,  
Endless and inalienable as rights entitled to all people.  
We without a defined identity to make a home in,  
Explore our truths in drag.  
America, the truest you is a bus ride chasing celestial lights  
across your geography,  
A collection of queer passengers and their indefinite identities  
being redefined and performed, ever growing.  
An identity from Simon and Garfunkel, haunted, indelible,  
growing and growing as the choir of the body of America  
intones melody and high harmony and descant in counterpoint  
with itself and reifying itself.  
America! Sing America!

America! To know you is to sing queer voices!

—To learn from strangers to themselves the heart of a nation of  
immigrants

—To understand a transcontinental journey inside one self

And why we fling open golden gates like closet doors

Onlooking outwards to a better knowledge of your  
unending "why"

And embrace it and grow with it knowing that knowing America  
is never gnostic.

America! In paroxysms of joy and confusion and fury and love  
are you known, do we know ourself!

America! I know that we have it in ourselves and all of our many  
voices and indefinite selves to be angelic!

America! I gaily sing our transcendent self, our God-gilded  
queerness, shining and shifting among nations!

America! Sing America!

**Pigs 4**

Leila Valencia