

Douglas Morea

SONG OF THE SWEEPER

I.

What song shall I sing?

I a sweeper of stairs and halls. (that is what I do)

From dust I have come, to dust I return?

Shall I sing of my need, I who suckle at dry seas through the
filaments of these bound straws?

And whom shall my soul query when it asks: when will I be
loved?

Shall I dare to sing my quest and question? (for surely I feel
deserted and betrayed)

And in the singing, might this very song become that love?

II.

Behold me, the pusher of brooms.

Behold me, the wielder of brooms down stairwells and halls.

Behold me, the invisible one, angling, deflecting, shaping the
dust in its homeward coursings.

Who am I

rising before the sun and setting after the sun? (Is it my pride to
challenge the sun thus, or the pride of someone or some-
thing flowing through me?)

Who am I, that into me should flow this burden, and out of me
should flow wealth?

I who push a broom have learned to put life into dust.

I do not do so waywardly.

I am skilled.

I have learned how not to sweat when the foreman with his
clipboard sweats, and thinks foolishly that so then must I.

III.

When will I be loved?
Yet it is with some shame I ask for love. (Why should I be
ashamed?)
This love has a face I cannot see.
Perhaps the face of my desire, diseased perhaps? or worse yet,
vacant? has driven off that which I desire.
How can I call it back, that I might gaze upon it? Stupid and
helpless as a bird upon the bough, I can only sing:
When will I be loved?

When I am in my grave? though that grave I struggle to contain
dwells in me this very day, yearning to break free?
When my fingers have moulded a helm out of the straight and
narrow handle of a broom, and driven so clean the stair-
wells and hallways in my charge it seems that gods go here,
then will I be loved?

I so delicate with a broom, I do feel shame when I confront my
spouse.
Have I pushed you wrongly or too hard?
My cohabitant,
my willed sister and brother, deep in our household's heart
stands a table.
In the breaking of the bread on that fair space, have I
shared enough, but broken and blessed too little?
And I so careful with a broom, feel shame before my child.
Have I pushed you wrongly or too hard?
My son, my daughter,
where in the perfection of the night lies the secret crack that you
will fit, that I might slip you in and turn and— Look: To-
morrow!

So doing,
then will I be loved?
So doing and so done, can I be worthy?

IV.

What I do with my hands matters.
My hands are the pumping heart of me, each day a pulsing of the
pulse of me.
I turn from my spouse, from my child.
I turn from my parents, from my friends (and I do mean "friend"
in the strong sense)
I turn from them all to be the heart that pumps the mystical
money-light that lights my country's highways and streets,
that drives its signals and signs and tonnage in the light of
its teeming godlike day.
I am the heart that drives the tremulous disappearing reappear-
ing ink of stainless steel ghost commerce, that pumps it
overseas for the laundering breath of wars.
I am the pump that pumps this evil holy magic through the
brains of what they call power (and what must be power, for
it does rule)
I am the pump that pumps this through the loins of what they
call liberty (and what must be liberty of a kind, however
dark and grievous a kind, for it does beget)

And I have fears.
A mover of dust has fears when he beholds the shining clean fat
faces of this great America, this Yankeeland. And there are
indeed so many of them here, white and black, male and
female.
I see them, not the chosen few among the many, but the chosen
many among the many more, and this is true not because of
love or goodness or virtue but because it is our time, our
moment among the millennia to be the land of gods.
Yet I have fears.

How long will the loyalty be bribed?
For we are gods in a land of gods, and when we coerce, we use the
coercion of the gods, which is bribery.
What muscle will be brought to bear when the bribery wears
raw, and the cold international winds blow in, and the cold
shifting ages cleanse us of our victories and our self-defeat?

How will the masters coerce us then, when the money ceases to flow, when the blood of our heaven ceases to flow through us in the fullness to which our taut skins have come to be toughened?

I think I know.

Yet, still, in having stood where the grain planted and not planted grows copious, I scan the prairie skyline for the snowcapped peaks I cannot see, where a holy sense of them glows like sunshine of a sun yet to rise up.

And as again standing among the papery singing straws with their heads heavy and intact, I look for the oceans likewise. I listen for the song of the seas that once made America separate from the world, that now eat away at us, wet mouths filled with teeth hewn from our broken shores.

These mountains and these seas, how unreal, how mirage-like they glint beyond this ringing horizon, this prisonyard of the earth's downward and awayward curving.

And my heart insists.

My heart climbs mountains of air. My heart hears high surf pounding out of these dry winds.

V.

They that look down upon me, catching enough only that they might know where they should and should not look, they choose not to know me.

To them I am unskilled labor.

To them I say: there is no such thing as unskilled labor, there is only unskilled love.

But what is a song to them that cannot hear?

I who am ahead of my time, will I be heard if I tell them I am their own future, the future of all that they love and dream on?

I will get old.

I will get old. My raiment of electrical fire gone, I will be a little shrunken man, a little shrunken woman:

A Manlet, a Womanlet

who needs no longer pull down the pants to take them off at day's end, but only let them drop beneath a bare bulb in a tenement without curtains.

How might I be loved?

With a song to answer or match my song? Can there be such a thing as a love head-on, or only another at one's side striding?

And if I were to be loved (for I too am most sorrowfully unskilled) would I know it?



Sheila Murphy

JONES' BLUEBERRY FARM

We would drive out east of Mishawaka,
past the hand-painted sign that read "U-Pick"
loop our belts through bucket handles, fasten them.

We would listen to a withered foreman
in a red cap
who barked, "Pick 'em clean!"

He would assign us one bush at a time,
a bush someone had given up on.
We would reach way in to gather a small handful
that made a dull thud on the bottom of the pail.

The blueberry patch contained a feast of eavesdropping.
We could walk in on someone's real life,
listen to a living soap opera
blue as our stained hands.

Sun gleamed on the old man's red cap.

Across the aisle from us were rich bushes
laden with berries
reminding us of delicious baked goods.