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La Curandera

Cynthia Henderson

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La Curandera

for Michelle Gibbs

The light could not be analyzed
out of the darkness
it was part of the darkness
from the heart of the dark

so gold you couldn't get the gold
out of the paper or the white
but the white came out of the paper
and the gold
in a way that showed
where they came from
from right where they were

the paper breathed
flexed its muscles
blinked back tears

the paper tanned
and bronzed in front of your eyes
liver-spotted and turned
leprous and scabbed

it knotted up and caught
like dreads
and hung you there
by your hair
and swung you like a pendulum
like Medusa had you
like you just turned into stone

it was like La Curandera
had your forehead craning back
beneath her brown hand
and the picture of everything around me
starts to deepen and blend

and the brown gives
rise to the colors
to the gold and the white
in a way that shows
just how they come forth
from the dark to the light

it was like the icon
up over the altar brown brown
lady way up in the sanctuary
up over the tabernacle
in St. Josaphat's Church
decked out in filigreed
gold like a monstrance---
how did she get there?

I was turning into stone
they told me
it's all right
it's Matko
Boku Czestochowa
she's just that way
because of the fire---
it burned the wood

Oh, I see!
That's the reason for her
straight, set-in Ethiopian nose.
Yes, and the Baby Jesus'
curly 'fro.
Yes, I see it,

it's like La Curandera
got my forehead craning back
beneath her brown hand
and I turn into stone
and the picture of everything
starts to deepen and blend

and the white comes out of the picture
and the gold
in a way that shows
right where they come from

From where she passes by, gold
in black,
in the original dress of
WHO I AM,
where how wonderful it is
for brothers and sisters to gather
together
to break bread and drink,
to make words and music

where you can
know the artist,
you can call her
by name:
WHO I AM

You cannot analyze her light
out of her darkness.
It's a part of her darkness,
from the heart of her dark.

It's like La Curandera so gold
you just can't
get the gold
out of the dark.

Cynthia Henderson
(We Clear the Land)