



PROJECT MUSE[®]

Throughout *Home*, symbols for maleness are everywhere: the stallions, the pimp's toothpick, Prince's stolen Ford, Doctor Beauregard's gun with its empty chambers. Symbols for femaleness are equally vivid: the Korean girl's orange, Jackie's iron, the "female paraphernalia" that anchor Lily to the earth—"douche bags, enema attachments, bottles of Massengill, Lydia Pinkham, Kotex, Veet hair removal, facial creams, mudpacks, curlers, lotions, deodorants." Women are the "home" Frank seeks to enter for solace, definition, meaning—"Deep down inside [Cee] lived my secret picture of myself."

Cee is an evanescent presence throughout the novel, a poignant captive of others' yearnings. Cee sees her own possible ruination in the killing that opens the book: "When she saw the black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her whole body began to shake." She remains a shadowy figure, always at the mercy of others' designs. Her powerlessness provides the impetus for Frank's return to a place he despises. Only by securing Cee's freedom can Frank attempt to atone for murdering the Korean girl.

Given that *Home* relies so sharply on the reader's collaboration, the story can be marred when Morrison explains too much, or when her lean characterizations tip over into caricature: "How could I like myself, even *be* myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there?"

Toward the end of *Home*, Frank saves Cee, as he always has. In this way, he saves himself, taking responsibility for his wartime degradation, reclaiming his sanity and sense of honor, and entering a more authentic phase of manhood. Cee, healed by a coterie of "good witches," has the opportunity to shed the legacy foretold by her "wicked witch" grandmother Lenore: "The girl was hopeless and had to be corrected every minute." Together, brother and sister return home to the original sin they witnessed, dig up the body, and rebury it: "Such small bones. So few pieces of clothing. The skull, however, was clean and smiling."

Home resolves neatly—perhaps too neatly—with a poem of accord between the two adult siblings as they stand over the burden they've finally, and respectfully, laid down.

The core message of *Home* is that beauty, hatred, death, and desire can exist in the same place, in the same moment, and that the task of adulthood is acceptance of this complex reality. Through the book's lean architecture the reader is guided toward Frank's coming home to the contradictions that reside within his own imagination.

Sheila Maldonado. *one-bedroom solo*. Fly by Night Press.

REVIEWED BY METTA SÁMA

In the Afro Punk film *The Triptych*, visual artist Barron Claiborne provocatively urges listeners to throw out Richard Wright books because, to paraphrase, no

one's life is *that* bad. His distaste for Wright was in the utter sadness and depression present in the books, the lack of humor and, so to speak, *Good Times*. Sheila Maldonado's debut poetry collection, *one-bedroom solo*, would not disappoint the reader who seeks levity in tales of the New York City working class.

Maldonado's poems are performance pieces; she sees the performance of daily interactions (yes, the world is a stage). Often the poet "maneuver[s]," "tip-toe[s]," "slide[s]" from one encounter to the next, negotiating her self-made world with the commotion around her. Finding a parking spot, for example, is a negotiation and ritual between herself and the "mighty beneficent Parking God," who blesses her with a car in a neighborhood that is "hundreds of thousands strong / each vicious resident with his own car" ("All Hail the Parking God"). Language, itself a performance, comes to humorous life when a Spanish language song plays on the radio, and the chanteur sings one thing and a girl hears another ("Bubbles of Love"):

1990, Juan Luis Guerra puts out his most famous song and it goes like this:

. . . O-o-o-o-o
Pasar la noche en vela
Mojado en ti
U-u-u-un pez

A girl deep in the recesses of Brooklyn, hears this:

. . . O-o-o-o-o
To spend the night I don't know what this phrase means
wet inside you
A-a-a-a fish

In conventional written English rules, when a non-English language is written, it's performed in italics. In Maldonado's poems, she ignores those rules, truly blending Spanish language with English language. For example, in "Tube Ties," she writes: "We both correct her / quick, "Todavía / está, a las dos / de la mañana." This quiet political statement can be seen elsewhere in Maldonado's poems, a sleight of hand that subtly maximizes the politics in the poems.

The poems are often simultaneously dependent on music, the visual world, and words to transform everyday experiences. "Pool," which begins, "Words have not held me up like the water does. I would like them / to try, acquire a density that changes gravity, changes how I think / of me, if I think of me," stages the tone for solo wanderings. The performance of language, music, and the visual world, a dynamic trio, becomes the locus for the metaphysical eye. Often the wandering philosopher is depicted as a grand sojourner who moves from one part of the country to the next, from one continent to the next, in order to understand human nature and the origins of human behavior. While the narra-

tor in Maldonado's poems certainly travels across the globe, her main travels are from one New York City borough to the next, and in these travels, she also seeks to understand the ways in which people behave and desire. She is able to locate then the beauty in, say, a park at night (which, in NYC, automatically becomes a battlefield at nightfall), which a potential mugger may see as a space ripe with opportunities. From "At the Meer in Harlem," she writes:

It's me
with me in the dark park hoping no one will be stabbing me. No one should be. It feels too cozy mellow for stabbing. If it were to happen it would be aesthetically inappropriate. That criminal would have done a disservice to his/her art. That's what I would tell him/her. It's not a night for that. Make out the ducks in the middle of the ripple, stabber. Avoid the raccoon silhouette on the garbage can. Count the orbs of traffic signal lamppost light, yellow, red, white in the bizarre water. Take in the green smoke.

Cleverly painting a "wavy, impressionistic Monet world," the poem calls to mind W. H. Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" and "Musée des Beaux Arts." Maldonado's contemporary ekphrasis relies on language to create the painting and, again, subtly, marks a political stance, calling on all of us to see art in all spaces. A reversal of this technique is in the poem "The Oracle," which is based on the film "The Matrix." I'll quote this short poem in full, as my final offering of some of the wonderful (and funny) performative pieces in *one-bedroom solo*.

I wish somebody
would sit me
in a chair
in a room
in the middle
of wherever and
have people come
to me to answer
their questions
about *The Matrix*

Imagism and modernism at its contemporary finest: each line an image beat, a sound beat, a thought beat.

My only quarrel with the book is that it's overly occupied. Many of the poems feel like workshop poems, and many could use a workshop. The "I am" assignment, a popular one in classrooms, appears at least twice in this book, although they're smashed inside other poems. (I'm not sure there is an easy way to get beyond seeing the simple "I am" phrase outside of a workshop context.) As well, the poem "Five Words a Line, Six Lines a Stanza, Seven Years of My Life" an-

nounces itself as a writing prompt. There's nothing wrong with including workshop prompt/exercise poems in a collection, of course; however, many of these poems lack an emotional, spiritual, intellectual, psychic, and/or bodily center. Otherwise, *one-bedroom solo* offers poems by a flexible mind, a funny and often finicky heart, and a wandering spirit.