

Morning After the Rodeo

(Calgary, 1988)

NORM SACUTA

Norm Sacuta (nsacuta@oznewmedia.com) works as a writer and editor for an educational on-line publishing company in Edmonton. His work has recently appeared in The New Quarterly, Grain, and the anthology Threshold, and he is currently at work on a short story cycle. He says of "Morning After the Rodeo," which comments on the gay rodeo held in Calgary each Canada Day weekend, "if people find a poem like 'Morning After the Rodeo' politically problematic, that's a good thing: the whole event is problematic."

No tent is without an open invitation,
every open shirt is a pale imitation,
just what's expected, so expected
these parents newly arrived, awaiting the exodus of buggers
tell their children to stay arm's-length from those
boys who step a bit too gingerly into the morning.
These real men, real cowboys, real ones
except the children know now not to come close
just like real ones except,
flowers bloom inside those big men's jeans
when flaps flip open and boots, a bit too pointy,
point into the morning –
real enough, but not really
convincing anyone.
The children keep their distance.

But it's their voices wake us
and we drown back into syrup, two-stepping, stuck,
convincing ourselves, excepting ourselves
from all these children

who have been warned

keep your distance. The distance between convincing
and a convincing cowboy. Yesterday
one stepped out of the camp shower, tossed back
the wet curtain where a half-dozen men waited
to wake up, and woke up suddenly
his immense body a chest beyond any gym and we all
thought *this is it, this is real*
but faggot-none-the-less! We were proud of
his accomplishment. He left quickly
blushed the same embarrassment as Marilyn
seeking some acceptance of his other skills.

But who's here for that? A bull-rider, sure
except we watch not the event but how it feels.
So much animal jabbing skyward one moment
his loaded jeans push down on the back, rising. Imagine
ourselves not the cowboy but between him
and the Brahma. We are ground
into nothing but him, and dream of it.

(He knows it, too. Would not fuck anyone like us.
Wants a mirror without what goes on in his head.
Someone to hate what he is
and love, watch, oh, and blow him
while he rides.)

You see, cowboy, there is this one tragedy above all:
that love, falling hard, head-over-tail,
a great love need not be returned to be great.

Last night a tall, thin queen with eyes
so mascara thick they were Miss Kitty's,
crossed the dance floor in cowboy boots

fit for a concubine, a pink blouse and red wranglers –
 her black hat correct except a wig
 shot out its sides like Rod Stewart.
 And the panic spread too easy
 cowboys two-stepped wide around her
 as she wriggled to the patio,
 disgust following like a snake's hiss –
 exposed, exposed, hear them
not a real cowboy
 but even the Marlboro man has his toes
 up around his ears, here.

Ride home to this morning.
 The children keep, keeping their distance and
 their parents wait for the fakes to rise
 so the campsite will be safe.

Of a Sunday morning, ruined

by this rodeo's last, late ride.
 They miss their morning paper by the campfire,
 the photographs of car crashes, real captions
 full of empathy.
 They've cried over these
 for want of fame, a need – some tragedy not too close
 to befall them.

The world is full

of victory banquets, great big buckles
 and purses almost big enough to make a living.