

Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway examines Lo Kwa Mei-en's "Pinnochia on Fire" from her collection *Yearling* (Alice James Books, 2015). The poem, and a closer look at its sonic qualities, is included as a separate document. File under Geppetta epic.

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How It's Put Together

The title is our table, Pinnochia's word associations at one end, flammability the other.

real girl	arm	leg	mayday flare	pyro	wick
head	tongue	teeth	match	dry	fuse
bony	heart	female	light up	burns	ash
haired	alive	creaks	firework	ignition	trigger
virgin	sister	her	temperature	hot	go up
			aurora		

The takeaway: avail yourself of word banks when the blank page is your Medusa.

The poem's double-billing is persona plus variations on a yearning theme. What are Pinnochia's wants?

Affection?
Sisterhood?
Bouquet astronomy?
Deciduous polymath?

Pinnochia's rejection in a tight sonic space—"There is a line that could make you love me really, / but reeling,"—fuels her homophone arsenal, banter replaced with a colloquialism for the telephone ("on the line."). Gloom goes celestial in a turn on the oft-repeated description *pinprick of light* ("all star // -light began to prick"), *prick*'s connotative piercing not far from the relationship between a board and its nail.

The sky as *returnable* shows the lengths Pinnochia will go for courtship. So crestfallen ("sad wheel"), so combusive: "My arm the mayday flare, leg a picnic's / pyro dahlia." The contrasts are strengthened by linear irregularities. Doubtless, there was compositional glee in crafting these juts and indentations.

Pinnochia stays intact while burning herself to sleep ("when I go up I'll keep my head on // a pillow when I can"). Homophones *see/sea* are the wordfish with *syllable* bait. Though only our third stanza, the poet's proven how versed she is at deploying Pinnochia's anatomy, the tongue's (therefore speech's) depletion happening sooner than later. Ah, *wick*, you do know dire. Pinnochia addresses her rejector, a want of servitude ("ready-maid"), not coupledness, explaining

companionability's lack. Extreme lowness, "in the gutter," is a marked distance from "the main / avenue of heaven." Note the substitution in "I kept myself" and "I cut myself," the former preceding "a sugar // cube of vermouth." The *I* is granular-assumptive, "cool / and slender as a fuse with a sister," our incendiaries prone to family trees. The rhyme and simile (*sister, missed her*; "like a bullet train shooting past myself") of stanza five are welcome additions at the halfway point. The sixth stanza's monosyllabic near-rhyme "on time, / not mine" prefaces another simile, this one featuring the sole proper noun, *October*.

There should be an Ash Olympics, given the word's poem-usage frequency. As such, I award a medal to "the taste of ash a horny flower on / a hard female tongue" for its execution of the anatomical, botanical, and erotic. The command quartet thereafter begins with vocalization ("say holiday. Say harvest") and ends in preservation ("Stay / back. Stand back"). Don't forget, we're dealing with a doll and conflagration. A key desire of Pinnochia is humanity, so if we ever meet another comma as perfectly placed as stanza eight's "real, good" I will change my name to Cecil Caesurahoff. The pause acts as a podium on which *real* distinguishes itself from previous appearances. Had it been "real good," I would have overlooked the one-word summation, the Why and What at the root of flesh-and-blood risk.

Candescence derived from "the center / of aurora" is balanced by finality affixed to "the second of ignition." The penultimate stanza's closing image, "the heart of the firework," is effortless duality. I love embered ventricles as much as the possibility of a bottle rocket's Cupid. Pinnochia goes for the feral: "I'll hurt // to keep wild tonight," which makes *savage* all the more ideal as a line-mate, "temperature and light, so hot, so real, I come alive" proving the furnace was our fairy all along.

Prompt

Write a poem that turns our knowledge of a myth or fairy-tale character on its head. Create two word banks that relate to your title, which should be on the shorter side. Include two pairs of homophones; deviate from predictable hyphenation and lineation. Give us a comma placement so brilliant it medals in Punctuation.

Happy Poeming,

Jon