

SUMMER SPARKS

Claudia Castro Luna

As a girl, Claudia Castro Luna fled war-torn El Salvador with her family – her mother, her sister, her father, and her father’s books. Those books – texts on language, social history and mathematics – were a strange choice of luggage for someone fleeing his home country in a time of crisis. How could her father choose to escape with a box of books? As Castro Luna carried those books with her for decades, becoming a scholar, educator, and poet, the answer became: How could he not?

In New York a colossal woman raises
a burning torch, a promise to harbor
the tired, the poor, the homeless, the tempest-tossed.

In Seattle another woman fades,
homeless in a park, with the racing butterfly
of her child’s heart, her only compass.

A pendulum swings, all over the land,
from the luscious forests of generous imaginations
to the ruinous bigotry that clipped
Emmett Till’s wings. Echoes of yesteryear’s
Ghost Dance over Wounded Knee,
that sideway shuffle call for ancestors’ aid,
beats time before us again and again.

Fruit plump on summer’s light
in a New England vale ripens
alongside Southwestern’s border
bruised and battered fruit.
4th of July fireworks bravado,
the feeling of losing yourself in the jubilee
of the crowd after winning, collapses
under the crushing evidence
of the country that we’ve never been.

The sparks lighting up the sky then falling, folding back into night,
are they a celebration, the best part of summer, or more of a weeping?

Love and pain don’t strike
some over others with different strength.
We are equally susceptible to kindness
and to cold, and board together
the destiny of our shared country.

On an occasion like this,
from sea to shining sea,
it is a good place to begin, not end.