

Rochelle Owens

Triptych

**Texture Press
2006**

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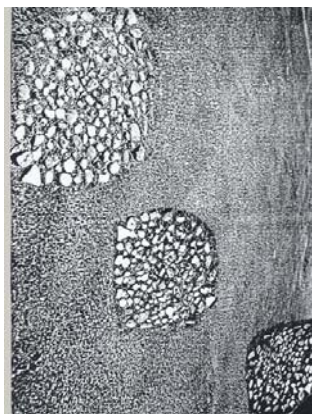
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ROCHELLE OWENS is the author of eighteen books of poetry and plays, the most recent of which are *Plays by Rochelle Owens* (Broadway Play Publishing, 2000) and *Luca, Discourse on Life and Death* (Junction Press, 2001).

*The cover graphics are based on earthworks by
Rochelle Owens, located in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.*

The artwork is by George Economou.



"Let him or her who has keen ears
of inner understanding pant for these
words with a burning love for my image."
-- Hildegard of Bingen
12th century

"If we imagine the cause of an emotion
to be actually present with us, that emotion
will be stronger than if we imagined the
cause not to be present."
-- Baruch Spinoza
17th century

Here We Are Like A Leaf Driven

Past two-by-fours scratches word
UTOPIA splintered wood transparent
BLUE larvae how minute bits
of damage punctuate until
you look behind
dust acres wet heaps
parchment there's more parchment
how minute bits alternate
punctuate ash oil SCOURGE
fingers spreading hour after hour
left-hand writing

Dirt walks in bloodstream spots
of RED turn into doodles smell wet heaps
BLUE wool cool GRAY-GREEN stone
Lucy female surgeon positions
the TRIPTYCH
encapsulating her life darker
background attention drawn
to column of archway black silk hood
pearls & lace WHITE as milk
drawn to The Book of Psalms
DESOLATION dust

Cycles core to core
CLOCK TICKS malt wine oats & straw
coal lead plumber work mills & dams
DAYS collecting how minute cracks
in porcelain light etches
nucleus riddles shell WHITE fear
etches scorn curved
a club-footed newborn detaches
segments of waterjugs BLUE
face to face self spawning
transparent BLUE larvae

Opening waterjugs GRAY bundles
how she scratches word DAY numbering
waterjugs the method simple
for young women broken-toothed
contemplating RED spots
rubbing oil into scratches
BROWN RUST magnified in water
rows of BLUE self-spawning
You will stay here an HOUR or two
observing the WORK of women
here Lucy in open fields

She can be seen behind the background
1000 years dwelling of Lucy
in America
force oil on wood explain the allure
reverse position your eye glides
past acres TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS
here we are like a leaf driven
a foretaste STRAW & MUD
allure allure BLOODY foreground
detaches segments flooding
mountains hole DESTRUCTION

Noticing the room doorway arched
windows different from traditional
American farmhouse 1000 persons
make up ideal VILLAGE
1000 years uncaused syncopated
WATERJUGS broken-toothed
young women look behind
SPLINTERED WOOD brown rust
Lucy says "phases a solitary life"
uncovers triptych facing images
eyesocket shut GREEN

Is your disease a mind?
to each his own plague think about
how invisibility yearns to
punctuate your existence
minute bits of damage signal
her partner
against lighter background
21st century phases Lucy whispers
a solitary life
tendrils of her hair wet from rain
smell wet heaps BLACK ASH

Plastic bags bulging eyesocket
your skill cutting
measurements acres numbering
house after house empty
a PINK sun fading film reels
indian summer heat of a september
day 1000 people thousand years
features of her face
transparent BLUE
you draw broken-toothed
young women the background darker

There her partners swing
drive NAILS into two-by-fours
pursue young women tendrils of
her hair thrusts out hip
practice phrases like "tell me
anything else before the WORST happens"
light spirals windows alternate
in your fervor silhouettes merge
with triptych animate core to core
force revelation portrait of
old women tying up GRAY bundles

“Women’s stuff” salvaged waterjugs
you want to choose BLUE waterjugs
but one with long hair pulled
toward the nape genesis thinks Lucy
she herself will declare
“how hard a woman with such talents
and a HEART magnified in water”
separates malt wine oats
morning wearing BLUE wool
while doing what she is able
when the shutters of triptych open

She looks at a panoramic view
indian summer BROWN RUST
like a leaf driven acres reins
of a GRAY donkey
you step easily into inhabit landscapes
past frozen LIGHT weeks of february
three hours part of the word
UTOPIA blurred
noticing the room standing
under arched windows
ideology ideology SCOURGE

ETERNITY drinking out out
of a cracked glass he hands Lucy
straw earth mixed together
straw & mud when she tells story
yearns to punctuate your existence
waiting for water to boil
Lucy’s dress of BLUE wool merges
with triptych blocks arched windows
making a praying gesture
hands her straw coal lead
plumber work

BEFORE and AFTER she tells this
detail a beginning site absent frag
ments floating above sexing a SKULL
Lucy female surgeon with head upward
observing how spinal cord seen
from a different angle MENACE
following you between the mayhem
descends to EARTH
segments of waterjugs pile up
dust acres wet heaps
it will be friday tomorrow

Her GRAY wool cape DRAWN
around her shoulders same cloth
same cloth superimposed eyesockets
eyesockets spawning
transparent BLUE larvae
you hold scales in your hands
weighing greasy bones
bones into light bones into
light light
saturates
ash oil scourge

DECAY earliest hit and miss
is a favorite SUBJECT still life
racing past BEYOND landscapes
salvaged two-by-fours WHERE
old women lifting lowering DIRT
makes her quota walks in bloodstream
VISIBLE
swings in semicircle
minute bits of damage
objects crashing DOWN
as if it was a bowl thrown

SWEEPING splinters word SLAY forward
in time you tapped your fingers
traced the half-skull half-mask
rows of repetitive windows
part of the hidden
sketch more nails driven
bone held in its long
axis light magnifies
cracks how in your veins
core to core YELLOW
here her daily life

SEPARATES until before and after
indian summer a thousand slivers
visible like BLUE larvae
as if to slow down lifting
waterjugs you are spelling
word UTOPIA the seven maidens
lifting and lowering
beginning plumber work
with neck hooked look past
two-by-fours to Scenes from
the Story of

Here is Lucy like a leaf driven
VEINS SPIDER the eye sockets nose
mouth & chin lifting a mirror
reflecting objects a fossil shell
you hold out slowing down
a FORETASTE wiping an apple
pale and red saturated
ups and downs your shoulders
pulling how her neck hooked
biting from a different
ANGLE

Slowing down transparent BLUE larvae
lifting lowering ups and downs of
indian summer wrapping
segments of waterjugs searching
under STONES hearing the shutters
separate this depiction
of events
an IDEAL village seen
from a different angle
never like this
freak accident

This is where ends 1000 years
she says DAILY life whose genesis
magnified in water becomes one
drinks out out of a cracked glass
salvaged what could hold SCALES
in her hands to one side
the triptych off the hook
in the lower corners of her mouth
pale and red laughing
when you tell this detail
a BLOCK of history

SATURATED mouth of waterjug
for the first time held out of
the body taking refuge here
her partners PULL knives punctuate
practice thrusts ups and downs
fingers traced spinal cord
segments indistinguishable
scapegoats
infused with malt wine oats
dirt wedged in shutters
of triptych

They find old women repairing
handles waterjugs repairing
BLUE porcelain numbering fragments
collecting nails rope wire
plastic bags SCAPEGOATS
cutting GREEN rows of repetitive
windows story of a thousand
years BLOCKS of history
crashing down losing in last night's
freak accident transparent spirals
measurements broken-toothed

If it's tuesday it will be wednesday
tomorrow Lucy ties up GRAY bundles
wiping away ASH oil as if
the outer cover were the only thing
which could hold the attention
waiting for WATER to boil
woman hands Lucy straw under
arched windows tightens her
black silk hood
earth mixed together striking
two-by-fours

Forced to cutting blocks straw & mud
wide open jaws of a GRAY donkey
still visible against darker background
thrusts out hip FREAK accident
knocks against waterjugs splintered
wood New Exhibit woman black silk
hood staring at memorabilia
fading film reels BACK IN TIME
BLUE waterjugs crack abnormal
gene calculations dry wet shapes
spinal cord

Salvaged flat tire marks next
morning wednesday
rules for repairing porcelain
reject damaged handles reins
of a GRAY donkey
collecting in automobile
graveyards broken-toothed
young women how spots of RED
mass cutting BLOCKS ice rain
uncaused DUST winding path
you touch dry wet heaps

Parchment BLACK PLAGUE
fourth dimension RED burning
mass extinction wedged RED spirals
implosion explosion
but you still pour scrub oily stains
being a cleanliness freak
slender monkeys spill benzene
spreading spots of RED
hour after hour
she looks behind two-by fours
scratches word FLOWER

She ties up heaps wet parchment
The Book of Psalms
malt wine oats straw coal
lead plumber work mills & dams
years DAYS collecting frag
ments burdened acres barren
core to core cycles DESOLATION
clock ticking dust
spirals implosion shut off
closed down
revelation is meditated on

Beyond cracks about STARKNESS
she etches porcelain she etches
waterjugs
she could not help observing
stones seashells barnacles
RED AND PALE sun
she says a solitary life
glides glides face to face
thrusts out hip
balancing waterjugs
flinging her GRAY wool cape

Catching it on a nail
your skill with a SWORD you draw
broken-toothed young women
you say plumber work allure allure
etches etches transparent
BLUE larvae numbers salvaged
waterjugs splashing you know
how minute bits alternate
dust acres wet heaps
like a leaf driven

Here they appear crossing Styx
in your veins SEVEN MAIDENS carrying
waterjugs they practice making
a praying gesture from time
to time laughing up their sleeves
waiting for WATER to boil
horsing around two are identical
twins pouring wiping away
seven maidens WHITE as milk
cut from the same cloth
making a praying gesture

She holds out cracked glass failing
to measure dimensions that we may wonder
“the vine shall give her fruit”
scratches word DOMINION hearing
seven maidens laughing
horsing around
crossing open fields racing
in their fervor
but one with long hair pulled
toward the nape glides past
heat of a september day

Now notice rounded chin mouth
parting when she tells story
how she tries not to knock against
waterjugs
horsing around under a PINK sun
wiping away earth mixed together
wandering further
you can STEP easily
into landscapes
you find old women collecting
nails rope wire

Here and there young women under
arched windows as if it was
a bowl thrown how minute cracks
in porcelain ice rock
DARKNESS covers over
mouth & chin hands held
PARCHMENT
you practice forming CLAY
with blindfold eyes
hour after hour force
revelation

When you tell story of the BEFORE
AND AFTER yields bone by bone
she wipes away DIRT
handles damaged objects crashing down
now this fluke of history BOWLED over
Lucy wandering further BEYOND nudity
EDEN makes her quota
magnified in water
ups and downs of arms WHITE as milk
seven maidens following
DARKNESS covers over

This CLUSTER moves back
The Psalms of The Book flashing
under RED and PALE SUN her skill
toiling in open fields seven maidens
make their quota pulling
plastic bags data on the
SKULL
shutters of triptych close
behind her ALEPH BETH
whispers here we are
like a leaf driven

FERMENT beginning
a sequence backfires until STRIKING
the outer cover Lucy's hearing
objects crashing down bowled over
the cracks in clay that PART
of daily life LEPROUS
the other part cut from a different
angle forced wide open jaws
eyesockets HANG DOG
look past the mayhem back to back
WITNESS half skull-half mask

WHO has a MINUTE has
a thousand years
the skeleton made up PARTS
until dragging two-by-fours
drawing this fluke of a skull
MINERAL thinks Lucy its hardness
detaches this obscure action
repetitive You are seeing seven
maidens
their arms floating above
RED & PALE

DETACHES handles a bowl you hold
here the outline oval EYESOCKETS
traced broken-toothed
young women moving towards you
she has a minute Lucy says
HIT & MISS she is
making mustard tightens
the cap of the jar wiping
mouth & chin PULVERIZE
segments of waterjugs
you are where you step

MEETING here little by little
falling between the cracks outline
ESCAPE is meditated on pursuit
of seven maidens REFUGE
from a first step
where young women visible
under arched windows MAGNIFIED
cold slivers of porcelain
how minute bits
alternate your woes DAILY
she positions the triptych

BEFORE and AFTER she tells this
detail a beginning site absent frag
ments floating above sexing a SKULL
Lucy female surgeon with head upward
observing how spinal cord seen
from a different angle MENACE
following you between the mayhem
descends to EARTH
segments of waterjugs pile up
dust acres wet heaps
it will be friday tomorrow

Her GRAY wool cape DRAWN
around her shoulders same cloth
same cloth superimposed eyesockets
eyesockets spawning
transparent BLUE larvae
you hold scales in your hand
weighing greasy bones
bones into light bones into
light light
saturates
ash oil scourge

DECAY earliest hit and miss
is a favorite SUBJECT still life
racing past BEYOND landscapes
salvaged two-by-fours WHERE
old women lifting lowering DIRT
makes her quota walks in bloodstream
VISIBLE
swings in semicircle
minute bits of damage
objects crashing DOWN
as if it was a bowl thrown

SWEEPING splinters word SLAY forward
in time you tapped your fingers
traced the half-skull half-mask
rows of repetitive windows
part of the hidden
sketch more nails driven
bone held in its long
axis light magnifies
cracks how in your veins
core to core YELLOW
here her daily life

SEPARATES until before and after
indian summer a thousand slivers
visible like BLUE larvae
as if to slow down lifting
waterjugs you are spelling
word UTOPIA the seven maidens
lifting and lowering
beginning plumber work
with neck hooked look past
two-by-fours to Scenes from
the Story of

Here is Lucy like a leaf driven
VEINS SPIDER the eye sockets nose
mouth & chin lifting a mirror
reflecting objects a fossil shell
you hold out slowing down
a FORETASTE wiping an apple
pale and red saturated
ups and downs your shoulders
pulling how her neck hooked
biting from a different
ANGLE

Hearing word UTOPIA continuous
a thousand years yellow reflections
splinter morning to evening
you are able to trace a bowl
the farthest one seeing it from
a different angle SEARCH for
something to grasp around
your shoulders you could scratch
again word UTOPIA
how holding a bowl of water
you raise your hands

In your line you say plumber work
around a SOLITARY spinal cord
life still MAKES UP weeks of February
all morning to evening
Lucy is here like a leaf driven
once she gets going sleeves
of seven maidens alternate
at last glance lines segment
ONE is searching wandering further
dress of blue wool past
frozen light

A sort of physical TRIP TIK
bringing with it this
flake of three hope envy charity
alternate VICES VIRTUES
she positions the TRIPTYCH
wiping away dust minute bits
alternate this foreknowledge
hardly matters exodus thinks Lucy
taking refuge here with neck hooked
you lift two-by-fours
smelling benzene

Peering at BROWN RUST mayhem seen
in her QUEST you could always
practice phrases like "tell me how
did that happen?"
slowing 1000 indian
summers your life is
FORCING oil on wood smelling
benzene slowing down
this scene playing out fading
film reels forwards backwards
seven maidens GLIDE across

The one farthest WAY out there
look at how her dress
of BLUE wool swings swings
in semicircle STEALS
your attention scanning
OBJECTS infused with ash oil
from morning to evening this
perception self-spawning
how in your skill DAWN
into LIGHT red and pale
against the grain

SCARCE that you have all
salvaged rows of NAILS there
the features of your face
seen the oval outline drawn
half-skull half-mask narrow
closed shutters hands driving
nails into two-by-fours
pulling neck hooked
tightening one side WHERE
you close a shutter
it will be monday tomorrow

There with territory here
mills & dams WRATH from time to
time easily she fills waterjugs
curved these letters R
liquid caught in her hands
making a praying gesture
this ideal village
between the mayhem an ending
is this fluke of a SKULL
found see her position
two-by-fours

You shivering angling body
aging moving these LETTERS
turning a bend about to ask can
we stilling a voice kicking
our legs NIGHT & DAY dragging
waterjugs bending body
running before how her dress
swinging semicircles raising
blocking our view 1000
years in open fields passing
daily life

Vast FOUND your questions you
ask rules for repairing porcelain
despite not answering what
you are doing SCRUTINIZE what was
past two words ALLURE ALLURE
should he wait under
arched windows ABSENT with neck
mouth & chin in her fervor
how you try not to knock
against waterjugs
STRIKING this foreknowledge

Holding on the edge your attention
slips SINISTER acres under your feet
daily you say it's neither
HIT or MISS neither HOT or COLD
alternate DAYS what happens between
here & there she measures
closely waterjugs
she must glide her fingers
past the edge near where ash
infused with light
she closes shutters

Yes MATTER your hands magnifying
in water holding on edging nearing
seven maidens gliding past
horsing around light light
scarcely she makes her quota
plumber work HOT or COLD
darkening streaks beginning
territory marking sweeping
pulling tightening her
black silk hood
her shoulders alternating

Reaching upwards noticing
how much you can TELL where
in America ideal villages there
you once dwelled in the north country
what makes this WOMAN here
gazing upwards at charcoal cliffs
her black silk hood detaches
descends to EARTH
core to core animates here
she ties up heaps
makes her QUOTA

Played out daily you tighten
REINS of a gray donkey one side
BREAKS from behind rope wire
this scene playing out larger
yes DOUBT how before and after
TERRITORY beginning
from a different angle broken
BURNED into
word UTOPIA
WHERE you are BEHOLD
the TRIPTYCH

Never the TRIPTYCH'S wood
still marked that part is
saturated this racing PAST NOW
under your feet back into HEAT
of a september day
you step on a nail BLOOD
drawn darker slivers
how minute bits of DAMAGE
punctuate your existence
this is where begins
a thousand years

Another shutter opens face
to face you distance 1000
years alternate glass shards
VOLCANIC ash hour after hour
spreading heat of the TRIPTYCH
Lucy seen making MUSTARD
she measures closely YELLOW
her taste smell skill
oil on her mouth & chin
splashing wiping away
she SATURATES

She walks BREATH welling HEART
floating against the rules her
SKILL with a sword
warring the loss you see her
with head raised moving
towards you meeting here
translucent skull found
she questions scrutinizes
cranial BONES
how LONG
darkness covers over

Your NAME circulates all of
a SUDDEN under lightness what
outsider begins speeding up
her gray wool cape flinging
horsing AROUND it is a bowl
crashing down when her wool cape
swinging how before and after
racing past cracks in
the bowl ash oil scourge
she tightens
the cap of the jar

Since MIDNIGHT how long her gray
wool cape beyond dust acres
wet heaps PAST water magnifying
the bowl hands of Lucy
loosening reins a gray donkey
kicking its legs all your
life crossing flat tire marks
side of triptych
FLUKE of three SCENES where
you close a shutter
burning fourth dimension

You would FORCE your eyes
hour after hour all the landmarks
alternate SUSPICION my nights
near where you close a shutter
nothing spilling only
a bowl of WATER falls
raising questions RULES for
repairing porcelain
who should tell this
TALE of a changing
landscape

Lighter letters flattened
parts a solitary life la disparition
your days drawing RED HEARTS racing
past ASH SCOURGE all your
shoulders superimposed MAGNIFIED
in water KYLIX where its hardness
curved like a question mark
a space visible BLUE larvae
spawning
DARK into ABSENT hit & miss
tipping the bowl

This waterscape FIXED crosses
your mind PAST spinal cord still
the trunk and branches reverse position
splintered wood flattened LETTERS
linking parts DARKNESS LIGHTNESS
speeding up
dazzle YELLOW she holds out
cracked glass circles water
splashing Lucy's dress
she must raise her hands
hands her the TRYPTCH

So that they FOLD like doors
flanked name genesis thinks Lucy
standing in the middle
you answer her glancing towards
blurred drawn lines SCENES
become streaks saturated
triptych this detail
lighter in beginning red
PIT FALLS points out
scenes GEOGRAPHIC one can
say that your answer

Makes DETAILS stills weeks of
February sees GREEN gutted
HOPE ENVY CHARITY in front
of a word molded by water
a fossil shell found with
cold slivers ANIMATES
as if to speed up old women
collecting segments of waterjugs
see them position without
a false motion hunching
their shoulders

Destroying word SLAY directions
you want to take when back to
back drawing segments of windows
cutting blocks hardness SHELL
molded by water blue larvae
spawning in their FERVOR
over NUMBERS you see them
drawn to side of DAY
daily you position wet heaps
flake of three VICES
hope envy charity

STRANGE meeting here
where old women listening she is
telling a story continuing what you are
DOING hunching your shoulders
pulling how your neck
reflecting in a mirror eye sockets
nose mouth & chin here is
where its hardness detaching
forcing the cap of the jar
as if its cracking in her hands
punctuating hit & miss

WHERE the only other event
is here NATURE blurred red
RAIN hit & miss all those parts
reflecting what you are EARLY
winter magnified
the features of your face
CORE to CORE eradicated
from a different angle UTOPIA
remnants under her feet
all morning to evening
again word GUTTED

And yet what she IS
linking together infused with
malt wine oats biding her
TIME keeping one or two NAILS
salvaged repetitive where
YELLOW segments bones light
lightly in time tapping
your fingers DOWN your mouth
& chin wiping away oil
her rounded chin RED AND PALE
the apple of your eye

I in my youth strolled until cracks
foreground hem my GRAY dress swings
in semicircle light arching liquid
darkening STREAKS here is Lucy
she measures all morning
to evening with head lowered
I answer scrutinize the bowl
background SCENES dazzle speeding
YELLOW
absence of seven maidens ALTERNATE
spinal cord MAGNIFIED

No one SPOKE to her like her
of the color YELLOW each to
his own REVELATION boiled BLUE
wool Lucy is in FOREGROUND
lifting her head LIQUID infused
with SPREADING a thousand
years DOWN the cap
of the JAR falling she
alternates SEGMENTS KYLIX
spilling a bowl of water
blue wool SEPARATES

In this BACKGROUND one knows
reflecting how HOURS mass numbering
a thousand years FORCE the cap
of the jar DOWN ABEL to CAIN
thinks Lucy SIGNAL your
partner but one with
long hair pulled GLIDES past
moves back descends to EARTH
her gray wool cape
COVERS over SCENES
beyond RED and PALE sun

Spilling a bowl of water
blue wool SEPARATES one
in this BACKGROUND one knows
reflecting how HOURS mass numbering
a thousand years FORCE the cap
of the jar DOWN ABEL to CAIN
thinks Lucy SIGNAL your
partner but one with
long hair pulled GLIDES past
Moves back descends to EARTH
her gray wool cape COVERS over

Long hair angles down her neck
her neck bones linking
MAGNIFIED it is then that
your partner Lucy thinks
glides glides FACE to FACE evening
evening to morning SCENES
from this tale 1000 years certitude
guttled SKULL
GUTTED loss begins translucent
blue larvae racing past
DUST ACRES

Shallow side of a bowl SPILLING
malt wine oats her chin
rounded RED AND PALE
with her head raising LONG
hair angles down her
down her dress of BLUE WOOL
raising her hands opening
opening shutters of triptych
SPEEDING up this TALE
scratches word SCOURGE
animates CORE to CORE

Under NUMBERS "he shall come up
like a lion" beyond
red and pale sun GOLD VERSES
guttled slowing down automobile
graveyards ASH OIL WATER
where fading film reels
slowing 1000 indian summers
alternating and seven maidens
from the same angle
scrutinize CRACKS
in waterjugs

Face of an old woman CAST
me not off in the TIME of
old age when my
strength FAYLS forsake me
NOT and under water
angles a SKULL detail from
this scene playing out R
bending body TURNING
towards you where SCENES
superimposed ABSENT
in this foreground

MID matter minutes matter
in the margins old women
scratch left-hand
writing DESOLATION numbering
waterjugs "women's stuff"
past UTOPIA past SCOURGE
21st century DISPERSED
seven maidens crossing Styx
cut from the same cloth
wearing pearls & lace
wandering further

Then FEAR will fall upon
her back in time under
the black silk hood narrow
half-mask there your
attention played
played in a changing
LANDSCAPE
gutted TURNING towards
FACE of an old woman
gazing upwards
she walks in ACRES

Consumed by FIRE
seized the trunk and branches
Curved DARK into
ruby red measure your
solitary LIFE
how the background
SEPARATES shutters of
triptych
open/shut so that SIGNS
and WONDERS speeding
up cover over

Metamorphoses you are able
looking PAST your version slowing
tearing the cloth etching
LIGHT in the north country
red and pale SUN devouring
SLOTH LUST alternating
Lucy's life like a leaf driven
evening to morning
SPILLING
malt wine oats
spawning BLUE larvae

R R you will write VERSES
include minute matters customs
of daily life always slowing
down when you TELL
this detail waiting for
WATER to boil peering
closely WATERJUGS
she measures slowly
SPINAL CORD its hardness
curved parts linking
a thousand years

BARREN a desert measures
dispersed PIECES caressed
what are SACRED VERSES
seven maidens GLIDE across
the one farthest slowing
up swinging how her
dress swinging semicircles
ALLURE ALLURE
scattered pieces of asphalt
you close a shutter
ABSENT into DARK

PLUMMETING where revelations
rosettes red and pale
the one closest speeding up
steals away this DESERT
where the only other event
is here DOWN
your mouth & chin wiping
away oil CAIN to ABEL
superimposed half-skull
half-mask
VEGETAL TO VEGETAL

Showing them all the
BACKGROUND 1000 years here we
are like a leaf driven
this is where begins a thousand
years WHERE you practice forming
CLAY handling a bowl tracing
the oval outline being
a landscape seeing that
this detail is told
desiring to part DARK
into ABSENT

Offerings made by FIRE we
are there to tell
SCENES FREEZE of a November
DAY and EVENING
latest miss and hit
as if it was a bowl thrown
over a LONG line
Lucy measures closely
cracks in the bowl you see
her with neck hooked like
a question MARK

And before I had done speaking
BEHOLD under
red and pale sun wandering
further spilling water
with your head raising LONG
your attention turning
"Women's stuff"
and standing near face to face
are BLUE waterjugs
lifting and lowering
BLUE waterjugs

Wrapping around her head
she must RAISE her hands tying
under her rounded chin POURING
upon her ash oil streaks
saturated honey gold
ruby red peacock blue
ILLUMINATION gutted TORMENT
Lucy thinks a sheet of gold
PROSTRATE she must MARK
the end of VERSES geometric
VEGETAL to VEGETAL

Lighter letters WHITE INK
pouring verses organized four
forms right to left SKULL
vegetal to vegetal
GOLD VERSES prostrate
your ATTENTION spreads
ASH OIL WATER
elements your eyes measure
blue wool geometric
mark the SAVED
core to core

Caressed mouth & chin
lightly in time RED AND PALE
infinite her attention organizes
an inscription lighter letters
AMULET to one side
touched SEGMENTS gold verses
IMPLOSION is meditated on
ash oil water
magnifying cranial bones
so that they FOLD like doors
open/shut

Rooted more repetitive letters
spelling SCENES from the STORY
speeding up HEAT ASH OIL
water caught
in your hands see her position
waterjugs makes her quota
BEHOLD IMPLOSION
force your answer
GUTTED red and pale sun
No one spills a bowl
her eyes measure GOLD VERSES

Embedded SECRET INRI
you will behold SCORN no eyes
answer her narrative verses
erased a faraway land
under heat of a september day
here are ups and downs
half-skull half-mask
gazing downwards BURNED
into word UTOPIA
gold verses detaching
COVERS over

RUB OIL against the grain
measure the objects blocking
your view
1000 years customs of daily life
speeding up SIX POINT YELLOW
segments two nails
piercing hit & miss She
in her youth thinks Lucy
opening shutters of triptych
Lucy thinks of
automobile graveyards

Edge of VENGEANCE
wood the colors pale and red
this first glance tomorrow
monday beginning FROZEN
into word TREE the trunk
and branches reverse
position DARK into ABSENT
can you say that your
answer matters MINUTE
by MINUTE
blue larvae racing past

Torn into WORD stretch
melting ice wisdom of wood
for their TONGUES
are polished wood seven maidens
gilded and silvered racing past
BAGHDAD their EYES
full of dust
for all the gold in their
presence is just sand
FAT for a BURNT
gift

Silvered and gilded
REVELATION washing the word
morning to evening a bowl
of peacock blue spilling
VERSES ruby red
honey gold half-moon
shape of letters rivers
of color translucent
a bowl of water
held out to Lucy how her
dress of BLUE wool swings

From a LONG line desiring
to part DARK into ABSENT
ABSENT being
a waterscape while doing
customs of DAILY life
where your mouth & chin
SUPERIMPOSED
in this background geometric
elements ALTERNATE
answers listening
to her fingers tapping

DESIRE wooden homes
surrounded together linked
all those parts geometric
MARKS written
with WHITE INK desiring
to join both answering
questions by saying
"I in my youth strolled
all morning"
wrapping around my shoulders
my gray wool cape

To be alternating evening
segments of waterjugs filling
plastic bags FACE all DECAY
core to core
PARCHMENT wiping mouth & chin
ash oil scourge
SWEEPING splinters FROZEN LIGHT
Nothing is broken seeing
segments under my feet
evening to morning
TELL this detail

Slowly you LEFT the city
following behind
I am tying up heaps making
my QUOTA gutted foreground
this DESERT found CHASTISE
against DECAY here she
ties up heaps counts
SIGNS and WONDERS
alternating words sloth/lust
brazen/will
and your WOES begin

CHARITY saves from death
Can you scrutinize this DETAIL
so that SIGNS
and WONDERS alternate
red and pale rosettes
vegetal to vegetal
RIVERS of letters white as
white as milk
she SAVES from death
HOPE ENVY CHARITY
Lucy is in foreground

And all because when you
TELL story beginning
that PART leprous
you could scratch again
WORD utopia
who is SEEN in their quest
this life is FORCING
oil on WOOD
she must glide her fingers
so that they make
streaks

Paying a workwoman's
WAGES it will be friday tomorrow
on that DAY you shall pay her
as objects VISIBLE
from a different ANGLE
superimpose FAULT
as if on that day a loss
of a GRAY donkey
you are WANDERING further
you practice forming
clay that PART of daily life

Because this CITY was
a great city under RED
AND PALE SUN
step where you are
with head DOWNWARD where
old women lifting lowering
DIRT pulling with
neck hooked SWEEPING splinters
ACRES of automobile
graveyards she is the STRANGER
that walked among them

SEE when the shutters
open POSSESS parchment
it was earth mixed together
how forming CLAY
with blindfold eyes as if
she is purchasing
a service SPEEDING up
slowing down
my attention scanning morning
to evening
DAWN into LIGHT

STRANGER you are wandering
further UNKNOWN word
scratched on two-by-fours
CRACKS punctuate
half-moon a same angle
seen an ideal VILLAGE
wooden homes Scenes from
the Story of when
"I in my youth strolled
all morning"
it will be friday tomorrow

Which DAUGHTER makes
her quota the seven maidens
following closer known
BONES yellow
rows of NAILS driven
lengths of wood absorbing
DAWN into LIGHT
position at the same angle
a SKULL in OPEN fields
she once dwelled
in the north country

What does GAIN in knowledge?
how holding a bowl of water
where SCENES
are missing STOLEN
"women's stuff" thinks Lucy
stranger to The Book of Psalms
does holding a
BURNT gift BEHOLD ash oil
oldest hit and miss
REVELATION where the only
other EVENT is here

As rivers SURGING forcing
a split/Sea of Reeds
desiring to PART
that REVELATION as when
seeing a great
city under red and pale
sun because this city
was from SCENES from
the STORY of when
"I in my youth strolled
all morning"

Forcing that REVELATION
when the morning sun
seems like WHITE hands shimmering
how her mouth & chin
visible under COLUMN of
archway seeing it from
a different angle
then her half-mask consumed
by FIRE curved DARK
into ruby red then FEAR
will fall upon her

A bowl held out to Lucy and you
alternate VIRTUES
three virtues alternate
she raises her right hand
touching ROWS of repetitive
windows whispers
CHARITY FAITH HOPE
separates malt wine oats
how her dress of BLUE
wool swings swings in semicircle
here is the only other event

Choose the direction RETURN
naked gazing upwards
here cliffs infused with light
shivering ABSENT two words
alternate ash oil spreading
BEYOND racing past
WHERE between the mayhem
mayhem was never like this
you whisper SCENES
from the STORY
BEHOLD SCOURGE

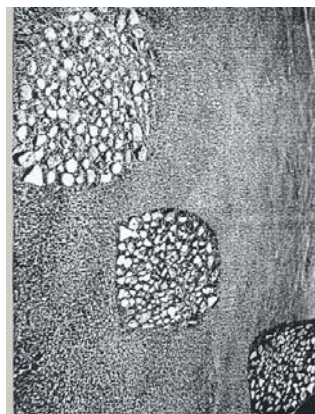
That only ONE of seven maidens
makes her quota
she whispers under RED AND PALE
sun it will be sunday
tomorrow
Again and again MEASURING
cracks in CLAY blue of
light in the north country
wasting a bowl of water
splashing hit & miss
covers over SCENES

FORM of ruin cooking pot
thinks Lucy here are KITCHEN
things "women's stuff"
handling a BOWL tracing
an inscription verses embedded
here near ACRES ash oil
when the evening sun DARK
into ruby red STREAKS
behind COLUMN of archway
Then she ties up heaps filling
filling plastic bags

You are looking following
the WAY that hearing
about SCARCITY
weakens the grip seven maidens
white as milk LIFTING and
LOWERING all that's left
of this FLUKE
of your story might be
a SIGN a BURNT sacrifice
the shape of a skull
DRAWN in sand

That is all ABOUT scarcity
BE white as milk
Lucy says in your STORY what
is left a vat of ash oil scourge
her feet CROSS this waterscape
a split/Sea seeing that
WHEN with her RAISED
right foot how her dress
of BLUE wool swings swings
in semicircle laughing up
her sleeve from time to time

Block the other part a VAT
spilling arching liquid
beyond your feet from time to time
with every STEP crossing this
landscape what STORY
is playing OUT in a changing
landscape into BLUE wool
allure allure splashing
the nape a SOLITARY workwoman
laughing up her SLEEVE
makes her quota



The Language(s) of Rochelle Owens

by Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.

Triptych represents a departure from Rochelle Owens' work, at least upon first glance. *Triptych* is deeply spiritual, filled with allusions to the meaning-making processes that inform the sacred and sacred texts.

One could argue, however, that Owens has always written about the sacred, and her earlier work, while seeming to be profane, has been, in reality, a deep plunge into the very heart of the sacred. Her work has affirmed the existence of the sacred.

Nevertheless, Owens' work has been largely misunderstood in the past, and the disruptive content in works such as *Futz* or *Black Chalk* has been viewed as an end unto itself. While the facile conclusion would be that her unmaskings of hypocrisy and the emptiness of institutions lead to an ultimately nihilistic existentialist stance, the more careful and astute observation is that she uses disruptive and mock-comic dialogue to affirm the reifying power of language, either to destroy or to create.

Language, in Owens' discursive universe, serves to invoke the generative powers of fragments and phrases, and bear witness to the generative act of syntax ordering itself into meaning(s). Her language illustrates the process of becoming, and it captures the moment when language invokes action and process.

The language of *Triptych* counterposes the bland, quotidian words and phrases of everyday life with the raw, magic-producing fragments that comprise the building blocks of a

singular utopia - a utopia of sacrifice and redemption, of purposeful loss that raises the awareness of a host of murdered artists and societal "Others" who still exist as disembodied memory and consciousness. Perhaps this directly relates to the Holocaust. Perhaps it relates to an attenuated form of it that persists even today. It is not necessary to create a solvable puzzle from a set of words. What matters is that one recognizes that the generative energy comes from shouts of rage, joy, loss, and desire that come groaning through the night when one feels the most dislocated and/or adrift in the contemporary world.

Owens suggests -- in all her works -- that the polite lies of drawing room platitudes are absolutely venomous. Polite language allows atrocities to occur, for bureaucratise to creep in and strip individuals of their opportunity to armor themselves with words that resist, or with words that protect.

Triptych recalls Owens' brilliantly moving translation of *The Passersby*, where at the heart of the language is *geist* which could be seen as a soul, an essence, or an exercise that proposes to unify a person with the divine.

The journey toward unity requires, as a requisite first step, the unhitching of conventional language, an uncoupling from the rigid and ultimately false, limiting, and even life-exterminating language of conventional wisdom and platitudinous daily life, where language is reduced to bureaucratic procedures. *Triptych* demonstrates that fragmentation, combining, and then recombining is necessary in the pursuit of new knowledge, and requisite circumnavigation of a literary planet of her creation that leaves in its wake the shadowy outline of wisdom.

BIO NOTE FOR ROCHELLE OWENS

ROCHELLE OWENS is the author of eighteen books of poetry and plays, the most recent of which are *Plays by Rochelle Owens* (Broadway Play Publishing, 2000) and *Luca, Discourse on Life and Death* (Junction Press, 2001). A pioneer in the experimental off-Broadway theatre movement and an internationally known innovative poet, she has received *Village Voice Obie* awards and honors from the *New York Drama Critics Circle*. Her plays have been presented worldwide and in festivals in Edinburgh, Avignon, Paris, and Berlin. Her play *Futz*, which is considered a classic of the American avant-garde theatre, was produced by Ellen Stewart at LaMama, directed by Tom O'Horgan and performed by the LaMama Troupe in 1967, and was made into a film in 1969. A French language production of *Three Front* was produced by France-Culture and broadcast on Radio France. She has been a participant in the Festival Franco-Anglais de Poésie, and has translated Lilliane Atlan's novel *Les passants, The Passersby* (Henry Holt, 1989). She has held fellowships from the NEA, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and numerous other foundations. She has taught at the University of California, San Diego and the University of Oklahoma and held residencies at Brown and Southwestern Louisiana State.

