

*Rawdon Tomlinson*

## **Two Poems**

### **Corporal Fun's War Dance (Mount Vernon Barracks, Alabama, March 1892)**

The doll She-had-a-red-spot-on-her-somewhere sewed  
for Maggie moulds and falls apart. All is background  
another pine barren's winter ending  
with bird call and dripping branch;  
TB melts the people like ice in summer.  
Madness fits snugly into this nest.

The barracks bet the coil bed heard everywhere  
is two Tontos sparking your wife.  
Corporal, polish the cartridges;  
see that the shoe mirrors your inspecting  
dis-embodied face, that the Springfield  
clicks in sync

with the tongue you've learned, barking  
"Right shoulder, arms! Present, arms!"  
Some days it takes a hundred rounds on the range,  
shoulder and chest bruised. Skirmish drill shooting  
is best, nailing the silhouettes  
that off duty, move . . . whisper.

The Captain assigns Geronimo—medicine man—  
to act as your counselor: Geronimo who now  
teaches Sunday school ("I don't think  
I'm an Indian anymore."); war shaman  
who once called you *segundo*, now jokes,  
"So, you have taken

The-path-that-runs-down-between-two-hills  
and gotten stuck down there!" But you don't laugh.

“If you train to fear surprise,” he says,  
“sometimes you’ll see enemies where there are none.  
This jealousy is like *baškegojitat*, angriness dance:  
night-fire rippling the rocks with shadows.”

Though you nod, he knows better, tells the Captain,  
“Nothing wrong with wife, problem Fun’s Brain,”  
and warns you, “There is no smoothness, your mind’s  
a scorpion”—but you don’t care. Awakened,  
it has already climbed from the burrow  
into night, already tuned antennae for the least

alterations of vibration and current.  
It cocks claws and arches stinger forward.  
It orients itself to stars, who knows why?  
Everything’s in order. It sits and waits  
for a soft body to devour headfirst.  
When it happens, it looks more like defence.

## **Camillius Fly: “Geronimo and His Warriors” (Canon de los Embudos, March 26, 1886)**

Mr. Chase lugs the tripod and plates  
while I arrange them in a line  
along the horizon, waving my arms,  
pulling on their sleeves Bourke said  
“with the nerve of a Chicago drummer,”

holding them with soul-catching lens,  
as though they’d risen from a trap door  
onto the lava bed of smokelike grass  
they float between earth and sky  
with guns, a sky so uniformly blank

it swallows everything unless toned  
and framed—to the north, ash-faint, swell  
the Little Pear Mountains, an apparition

in one of their exile-dreams—none of them  
or it really here, like a dead star's light

travelling through empty space  
to make a child's wish—Print No 180:  
posed as though for a wedding, or an execution,  
heart and hope of hummingbird medicine  
tied around their throats, like props,

Geronimo in the center with stick and drum:  
I ease the cover from the barrel, for light—  
while they wait in silence in the wind  
switching grass with eyes and ears from elsewhere—  
to draw their shadows on glass.

**Rawdon Tomlinson** is the author of *Deep Red*, published in 1995 by the University of Central Florida Contemporary Poet Series. In 2007, LSU Press will publish his second collection: *If You Could Lick My Heart: Geronimo after Kas-Ki-Yeb*. Tomlinson lives in Denver, Colorado, where he teaches at Arapahoe Community College.