

Destinos des Amantes

On a Serengeti Plain of granite
one meter square on a steep landslide
in the rain forest of a Colombian mountainside
at *Anchicayá* I watched a herd of fifty-five
pigmy mole crickets grazing in a field of lichens,
adults and young, wandering, courting, fighting,
the largest three millimeters in length.

Two great yellow ants and one brown crossed
the plain, only casually noticing the grazers.
Among them, however, hunted steadily and fiercely
a tiger of a strong red, black, and white assassin bug,
youthful but towering enormously over the prey, and
deadly efficient, he stalked repeatedly the tiny slender beasts,
squatting to tense his somewhat larger hind legs
as if to leap, then striding jerkily, wasp-like, in
all his motions, whether boastfully to call attention
to his hunting prowess or in a blind mimic deterring
some others larger and bent on his destruction
no casual observer could have told.

Swiftly flexing black appendages
he moved from prey to jittery prey, murderous
beak tucked along his breast in readiness,
diverting repeatedly to trail momentarily
a tantalizingly close grazer that each time
ran just fast enough, then when the great
carnivore struck with savage lightning
speed, sprang into the muggy sunlit air
and streaked away on purple wings.

Eleven times the stalker struck in vain,
pausing sometimes to reconnoiter,
flex his muscles, wait, or turn a new
direction, as if hopefully or in some kind of
arthropodan impatience. All across the
plain he ranged, empty-beaked,

spined forelegs seizing air, snapping on nothing,
black antennae, too, flicking wasp-like, irritably.

Across a rounded bluff of flecked stone, two
of the mouse-gray bodies played together,
responsive, warm in the morning sun,
peppered antennae flashing together
advancing, retreating as one in a courtship
my eyes were straining to detail. The
beast paused below the cliff, seeming to
sense existence of the pair, and angled up
the slope in parallel as if to pass, but
wheeled at the last moment to seize
with horrid viciousness, I think,
one of the temporarily oblivious *amantes*,
the other disappearing in a whirl of unfolding
purple fans. The monster stood motionless
long minutes now, its precisely appropriate
bluntly sharpened beak turning on its joints to pierce
deeply into the rapidly going lifeless body,
still undecided whether to be contemplating
loving or the mortality of this massive
irrevocability of torture. In fact

I could not observe exactly this last
event and only reconstruct it from the
realities of my (I thought to say, larger)
human experience. Afterward
I watched the predator disappear
beneath a leather-brown curling leaf,
to belch and digest the liquid feast,
I supposed, leaving me to wonder,
in the mist and muddiness of this impossible incline,
if that grizzled old *negro* along the road had really
meant to sell me something from the beauty of the
straight-legged *hija* who had flashed brown eyes
and white teeth at me while he talked his offer,
and turned away to flip with playing fingertips her
slightly crinkled skirt above smooth thighs
and smile across the blackness of her shoulder.