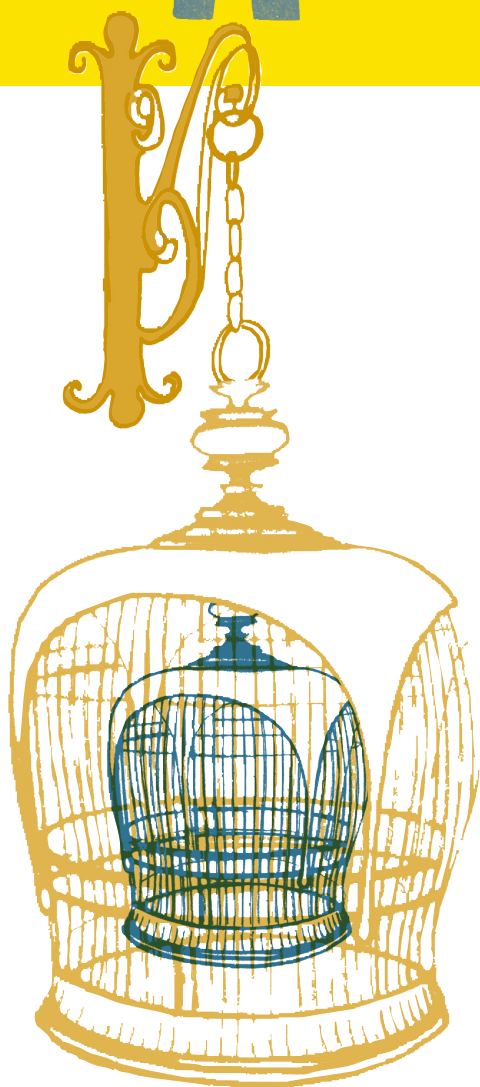


# COMBATIVES

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*About the Author:* Brenda Sieczkowski's poems have been published by, or are forthcoming in, *The New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Suptropics*, *Sentence*, *The Florida Review*, *Poet Lore*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *The Colorado Review*, *Margie*, *Make-Out Creek*, and *Gulf Coast* among other magazines. She co-edits *Quarterly West*.

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## Consumption

The one colossal elm survived by nursing  
its slow coal of rot  
through summer, the green *ting-ting*  
of ice cream trucks drawing  
children, flies.

The bomb pops, red-white-and-blue,  
purple tongues.

The stump's circumference is an old-fashioned skirt  
laid out in a brown circle on the grass.

In Taiwan, Beethoven no longer pipes  
the trash cans to the curb—  
the garbage trucks  
squawk English from loudspeakers:  
*How much does a pound of cabbage cost?*  
*Where do you come from?*

*I come from Tainan.*

Maple and catalpa, second-growth trees on the street  
where I grew up  
spark in a lettuce zenith of heart-star.  
Rare, scrawny children  
make eyes in the leaves.

## In Waltzes the Lobster of Your Dreams

You lean against the lit jukebox,  
umbrella open,

looking jellyfishish.  
Smaller, brighter umbrellas

drift by in grainy tropical drinks—  
the kind whose petals flicker

with tiny blue flames.  
Elvis again. And no change.

A ukulele mimics guitar  
in its hollow falsetto

and the pink plastic leis  
exhale a kitchen-drawer scent

of new garbage bag.  
Gaudy madras palm trees. *Again.*

And then the ruddy tap  
of an oven mitt on your left shoulder.

All at once you're dancing,  
one mitt closed around your hand

closed around the umbrella stem.  
One at the small

of your back, steering you  
through the grotto of spindly tikis,

back to the jukebox. Coins  
pinchered from a waistcoat

pocket: revolving Cure.

## Spill (I)

You're turning fall summer again. Underneath the layers: my under-

wear, unmatched leaves. We repaint my bedroom stoneware blue. Rolled pants, paint smeared

on the balls of our feet. A trail of small blue cocktail masks on

the hardwood floors. Winter arrives after spring—the world baring it-

self after so much grassy abundance. The flower beds push up sticks

crowned with bright packets of seeds. Columbine. Marigold. In a darkening room,

I press my fingers between your shoulder blades. Your birthmark tastes of salt

not wine.



## **Me, Wag**

*Considerably little juice in the synapse. No inner resources.*

- : A stranger's water gurgling in the wall pipes.
- : I can't tell screams of children in the alley  
from laughter of children in the alley. A parade
- : in the apartment above — clarinets and clarinets and  
snare drums — marches, marches, will not pass.
- : The world is too hot when I open my eyes — flickers  
of motion where motion is not. I can't tell
- : the screams from the sea gulls. No sea. Sky.
- : Children's too-small shoes. Buckle. I cut out all the tags.  
I put on a bathing costume.
- : If I take off my glasses, my face falls apart. I can't
- : tell falling from vertigo. I keep writing postcards  
to a dead. I don't know what postage.
- : No leaving. The deer might be back, grazing  
the graves.
- : Like a drag. Say so.

## Spill (II)

Which bird — muscular  
voice and gelled plumage — fills the  
car with Puccini?

You're right, of course. Win-  
ter zoos are desolate — the  
one swan yellowed to

old wallpaper, black  
feet leaking a trail of  
blue prints through the snow.

A pelican's ex-  
pandable yawn, umbrellas  
unpleated over

the bats toe-clawing  
red plaster rocks in their fruit-  
strewn case. My breath dis-

turbs reflections caught  
in glass. Too cold for rain. No  
tragedy. *Tosca*.

The elephants are  
locked away. Straw and snow: no  
buried trumpets. You're

right. The opera  
swells against the back of my  
throat: pungent, empty.

## **Last Mermaid of Florida**

1.

She swayed, ankles crossed,  
on a trapeze  
rigged to the living room beam.  
And as she swung she sang  
a Danish ballad  
her mother used to sing:

*Bören blæser saa mildelig  
og Bølger leger paa Sand*

The night was hot as kerosene,  
but still she wore a pullover  
and faded cotton jeans.  
She could not sleep,  
she said to me,  
between four walls  
nor under seven seas.

*The breeze is blowing so gently  
The billows play on the sand*

2.

The circus wagon yawned,  
an unlatched suitcase  
dumped on the empty lot.  
The topless mermaid  
swung and sang  
an old-time Danish ballad  
her mother used to sing:

*Det vaar söllige marre-mind  
och der han hoffdet aff hug*

After her act, the mermaid  
beckoned me,  
plucked a sequin  
from her tail and closed it  
in my hand.

And round about the broken  
bottles shone like brittle sun  
that's shattered on the sea.

*It was the silly mermaid  
Her head he there struck off*

### Circus Box with Inlaid Rimbaud #1

Door after door opens on a train corridor's tiny rooms. Busk and rosin. Violin and sawdust. I've worn the plush from the armchair's arms, greased lace, wooden legs. A tiny clock sheds split husks, copper beetles that whirl and click in my palm. Crease where the gypsy fell silent. I hear a tea kettle, train whistle, shriek of exotic animal trundled through white plains

*The Moon, : Like a wild animal, I pounced upon joy and strangled it*

inverted, casts a hallucinatory pall. My dreams straggle into morning's flaking towns—powdered tiger, sequined tiger, tail or whip—strangled and bedraggled. Toss and toss. *The Fool* turns over. Death-defying! Ill-advised!

## Circus Box with Inlaid Rimbaud #2

My student, meanwhile, caught Bubonic Plague from her cat. I canvassed the crowd, ripped off acts. My beautiful friend had a vision of the glass eye clutched in a raven's claw. Memory seized the one-eyed man at the piercing booth. Eye-patch. Pirate of vast, glittering agonies. I wore my octopus shirt and seduced the stranger with the octopus tattoo. Eye of needle in eye : I became a fabulous opera of Leviathan. I swallowed a whale. My friend refused to sketch my monster portrait. I pled. Oh, my collection of bird claw, I've plucked you from death. That oceanic pond drop stagnant with protozoan swill. Swell and billow. I've pitched my circus tent upon the sand.

### Spill (III)

Fix it so we're young  
in the same salty over-  
lap of summer. Your

lungs crunched in the thin  
burn of played-out oxygen.  
Sun a jellied smear.

Your lank and weedy  
body, green in the long un-  
derneath, swimming through

the memory where  
I almost drown. Pink plastic  
barrettes. A clumsy hand

on my scrawny,  
freckled shoulder as I drip  
on the thin towel,

baggy swimsuit puck-  
ering below the armpits.  
I'm lying on the

bathroom tiles again.  
This pattern's nauseating  
blur. Go home. You can't

fix it.

*Colophon*

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