



12-15-1994

From the Convention in Mama's Back Yard

R. S. Carlson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Carlson, R. S. (1994) "From the Convention in Mama's Back Yard," *Westview*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol14/iss2/17>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

From the Convention in Mama's Back Yard

by R.S. Carlson

Mama, for all the years
the family never traveled back
to what you'd call
"the ol' stompin' ground,"

now that you've "gone to your reward,"
I bring wife and child
to a literature conference
in the winter South.

We room in a grand hotel—
at conference rate—
still a state line from your birthplace,
but near enough to hear
the "ahs" and schwas your vowels kept
through our decades of children's stories
in the North and West.

Since your days, cash and law
and a dash of dignity
have mixed guest and service worker ranks
till color, now,
is not sole argument for class—
 who opens a hotel door for whom;
 who drives the van, who rides to the airport—
though the statistics of this century
through our lives
still creep toward our better dreams.

You would be pleased that so many teachers
came to talk over stories,
to test what and how they tell:

but you would not recognize
half the turns in the telling
since your Brer Rabbit studied law
and gave back to God-as-you-knew-Him
some latitude for grace.

Sistuh Possum and Sistuh Fox now spin stories
allowin' as how they left the ol' briar patch for The City
(a journey you know partly yourself)
since the day you did Amelia Earhart's perm in Richmond.
But sagas spun now vine past
the old segregations you knew.

And though women still sometimes
come out of the cold wind into lecture halls
through doors men sometimes hold open,
women also, now, open doors on their own.

Jewish Mothers of Midrash
cite their testaments to daughters and sons
genteel and gentile and genkind alike.
Before the memories fade,
old soldiers who haven't died
story the young who did,
and the scholars story the stories—
 fabling fragments rare to real;
 classifying assumptions, denouements,
 resurrections, resections—
and reclassify their classifications.

Poets tack the winds of gender:
Pittsburgh nuns beat the hell out of
boys errant in Catholic school;
Kentucky grandmas "cain't see the fuss



over two women sharin' a bed
 (like in the ol' days
 when a bed'n'blanket was hard ta come by
 fer a big fambly, 'n' the hounds an' babies
 warmed the feet anyhow);
they never imagine "'em" gals might
"rub each other the wrong way,
doncha know. . . ."

No, Mama, these days the tales explore
sweat by seam, root and branch,
thickets you did not traverse
via language and theme you would have marked
"better left unsaid between a lady and a gentleman."

The poems' lines don't necessarily rhyme
route stepping march
through the dimensions of our dust—
 the seen and the unseen, birth to pubescence,
 the obscene, the incessant, insensible,
 menarche to men, menses to menopause,
 the insensitive, the incensed,
the kiss, the cut, and the kill. . . .

Lips press all possible conflicts
for each possible breath caught chill
down streets beyond those you once walked.

So many stories, Mama, you would "not fathom"—
even these flowing in your home dialect.

But I gather you still might reckon—
past your twilight—our need
to speak stories of our own
 against the dark.