



theslowdown_20200515_20200515_128

Wed, 9/30 8:19PM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mother, nation, face, poem, glinting, children, patria, hart, fail, medea, pamela, motherland, duties, walgreens, confess, left, contradictions, broke, helpless, soft spot

00:06

I'm Tracy case math. And this is the slow down

00:27

Motherland,

00:28

Madre Patria. We are born of a nation, and we are shaped by its features. Whatever that nation offers, whether it's hardship or opportunity, is our inheritance. When we see ourselves belonging wholly to our nation, it can be difficult to decipher its flaws and shortcomings. We make excuses for its failures and contradictions. Just as family members sometimes cover for one another. It's a form of denial.

01:01

Conversely, when your own nation lets

01:03

you down, when it leaves you vulnerable, when it fails to make good on the promises of citizenship. The sense of betrayal you're left with is nothing short of traumatic.

01:16

I think the metaphor of a mother is

01:19

apt up to a point. But it breaks down eventually. Because a nation isn't a person. It's a geography determined by institutions. And those institutions are made up of different configurations of us. The only civic mother looking out for us is ourselves, we the people, is you and me. And whether we fail in our duties or succeed, the onus is upon us. Today's poem is American mother by Pamela Hart. It's challenging, angering, compelling in its depiction of America as a mother at once enamored of her children and derelict in her duties. When I first read the poem, I couldn't ignore the way it made me feel terrified than angry than helpless. I understand how much of a struggle it can feel like sometimes to do right by your children. And I know how much is riding on the effort. This poor put upon tired woman in the poem, this mother, who seems too young, or too lost to throw herself properly into the self effacing work of raising us, her children. Where should she turn to for help? What should she do? And what about us? What about me, and you? American mother, by Pamela Hart. There was the time I told your cradle I was done. locked you in the van, then shopped at Walgreens. I didn't feed you vegetables. I let the car slide into the lake. Watch you drown and blamed Medea. I held each of you one by one, under the porcelain water, dosed. As a man who wasn't your father broke your arm. I slapped your faces when your grades failed. When you were arrested. I denied you were mine. I confess to being the mother of all bombs. Sometimes, I just stained you. I confess I am not good. Sometimes the sound of the hawk chasing after the Crow was the only thing I cared about. But I learned the word fontanelle buried my face in the soft spot and oh the smell the world of your skin. The first morning after the night of your birth, even the landscape of the heel of your day old foot, the day gone to sleep and breast your mouth opening then closing as if to tell me the story of what you saw. Light glinting off a window and into your face. My large face like the ocean you would later swim in. Even as I love you, and hold all of you my children. I'm the good mother, the bad mother, the one who makes you then bombs your world to bits.

04:44

The slow down is a

04:45

production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.