

Snake Skin for Sale

The children held their white virgin robes
 Raised to the wind
For sails to carry them forward
 Across the beach desert
 Across the dunes of sand

Mother's warm silk blanket
 Homage to the wild
 Sacrificed for the hunt
Somewhere lost in Delaware
Somewhere in the emerald dark

The ancient story never dies
 In the master and the student
Still sometimes it is buried in the dirt
When the smooth skin of youth is shed
 The snake holds the tale in his eye

The skin is displayed on the roadside
Stretched and cured in the dust and smoke
 The beauty can be tailored
 For no real fortune, says the dealer
And she lights a cigarette leaning on the barbed wire
 Outside of the shade of the makeshift market stand
 Where her daughter swats flies and scowls
 Imagining an unseen beach
 And the sand on which to sail

Kristian R. Butterfield*Faculty Advisor: Virgil Suárez**Department of English*

The poem “Snake Skin for Sale” began as an image in my head. The image in the first stanza of children using something they all had to fly across a beautiful and barren landscape. It was something that came to me from mixed thoughts about childhood books like “Where the Wild Things Are” and from my own adventurous spirit I had as a child. The image is what I wanted youth to be, but of course when you are in the thick of it, riding the wind and flying through the desert, it doesn’t always feel like an ideal adventure. So I put myself back there, in the not-so-distant past, and travelled through the comfort and bliss of being truly young to the ages in which youth becomes a hindrance, something that we think we must abandon as we inevitably grow out of it, something we think we have to sacrifice in order to grow up. I kept going after that. I immersed myself in a future holding nothing of my youth except a jaded memory. I wanted this poem to tell a story about both the beautiful and ugly things that I found during the act of reliving and exploring youth as a value.

I’ve been writing a lot of abstract poems lately, this being one of them. I think in part the style has to do with the ideas I’m presenting in the poem. Abstract ideas are best served abstract. A lot of the power of the mysticism of the abstract is taken away when it is transformed into something more linear. I also find that with abstract writing I have more freedom with the art of language. I can focus on the sound of my poem and the image of each word without worrying too much about spelling out the meaning of the piece to the reader. This puts a lot of responsibility on the reader, especially because the poem is relatively short, but I trust you guys.