

Proposal to Misty · *Denis Johnson*

The early inhabitants of this continent  
passed through a valley of ice two miles deep  
to get here, passed from animal to animal  
eating them, throwing away the small bones  
and fornicating under nameless stars  
in a waste so cold that diseases couldn't  
live in it. Three hundred million  
animals they slaughtered in the space of two centuries,  
moving from the Bering isthmus to the core  
of squalid Amazonian voodoo, one  
murder at a time; and although in the modern hour  
the churches' mouths are smeared with us  
and all manner of pleading goes up from our hearts,  
I don't think they thought the dark and terrible  
swallowing gullet could be prayed to.  
I don't think they found the smell of baking  
amid friends in a warm kitchen anything to be revered.  
I think some of them had to chew the food  
for the old ones after they'd lost all their teeth,  
and that their expressions  
were like those we see on the faces  
of the victims of traffic accidents today.  
I think they threw their spears with an utter sense of loss,  
as if they, their weapons, and the enormous animals  
they pursued were all going to disappear.  
As we can see, they were right. And they were us.  
That's what makes it hard for me now to choose one thing  
over all the others; and yet surrounded by the aroma  
of this Mexican baking and flowery incense  
with the kitchen as yellow as the middle  
of the sun, telling your usually smart-mouthed  
urchin child about the early inhabitants  
of this continent who are dead, I figure  
I'll marry myself to you and take my chances,  
stepping onto the rock  
which is a whale, the ship which is about to set sail  
and sink  
in the danger that carries us like a mother.