

Couplet with Federico García Lorca's 'Ode to Walt Whitman'

I. The retired English teacher in my poetry class

who thinks that Walt Whitman is the beginning and the end of American poetry and that he himself was a hero for selling paperback copies of *Frankenstein* to his public high school students at cost and that Walt Whitman was the beginning and the end of American poetry and that a whitewashed reference to MLK and the Black boys who were a part of the landscape he knew growing up in Brooklyn makes his work searching and antiracist and that women write about sex and say *fuck* just because we can but there's no artistic value when we do it because Walt Whitman, who was the beginning and the end of American poetry, already innovated writing about sex and that was powerful and prophetic and all of that —

and all of that

reminds me why I thought I hated literature when I was in high school. That's not Walt Whitman's fault. It's Lorca's fault, for opening Whitman's tomb and dragging his corpse back to New York City and leaving it on the banks of the Hudson River where English teachers could find it; and it's my fault, ours, for not keeping vigil.

II. A girl poet does not have to justify her use of these words:

bitch, vagina, cunnilingus, the Ottoman Empire, hemlock, fucking, *cojonudo* (sounds worse than it is), *cabrón* (is only a funny word inside my own head), ass-trumpet, twerking, snail-jousting, abcess, frog, toad, cock, buck, bull, branches, basket, booty, green, green, green, scissors, ruler, contest, Eileen Myles' pronouns (they/them), quarter, abscess, fly, fascist, *gnudi*, Portia, *The Penguin Book of Erotic Stories by Women* (although good luck with that, because it doesn't scan), Benedict Cumberbatch (double dactyl), Walt Whitman, Federico García Lorca, Balthazar, Venus, nickled-and-dimed, Mr. Jack Spicer, President James Madison, closed, open, closed, fuck, fucked, and mercy.

“The truth is, the Viking textile from Birka has no Arabic on it at all.”

— Stephennie Mulder, “The Rise and Fall of the ‘Viking Allah’ Textile,”
<https://hyperallergic.com/407746/refuting-viking-allah-textiles-meaning/>

1.

لخا لخا

And maybe it means health and happiness. Abbreviated, naturally.

لخا لخا

Hold it up to a mirror, let it reflect what you wish to read.

لخا لخا

Maybe it is proof of Vikings. And maybe it is the name of God.

لخا لخا

And maybe the name of God is proof of Vikings.

لخا لخا

2.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ: بِرَحْمَةِ زَامِلٍ بِرَحْمَةِ زَامِلٍ بِرَحْمَةِ زَامِلٍ
نَصْرًا مِنَ اللّٰهِ لِمُحَمَّدٍ اَبِي تَمِيْمٍ الْاِمَامِ الْمُسْتَنْصِرِ بِاللّٰهِ اَمِيْرَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ

Illegible.

¹ “*Tirāz* (plural *turūz*): Embroidery or decorative work on a garment or piece of fabric. It later came to mean a robe of honour, richly adorned with elaborate embroidery, especially in the form of embroidered bands with writing upon them. In the earliest centuries of Islam, such a garment was worn by rulers and members of their entourage. A secondary development from the meaning ‘embroidered strip of writing’ is that of ‘strip of writing,’ border or braid in general, applied not only to inscriptions woven, embroidered, or sewn on materials, but also to any inscriptions on a band of any kind, whether hewn out of stone, done in mosaic, glass or faience, or carved in wood” (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.).