

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

Virtual Workshop: Teacher Skill-Building Workshop

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Created by Teaching Artist: Greg Geffrard

Forty-Three

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The moment before death the air ---
inexplicably -- tastes of wet horse.
The chest expands and something
unspools like wet vines. In this land
of child brides and teenage assassins,
a bus full of students dissolves
into the mountain mist. A retinue
of beheaded journalists mouth
clues while the young president
delivers platitudes. But what
do they matter? The students
don't know the kilos of heroin
stored below them. A boy of 18,
eyes gray as bathwater, charts
a man's face under his black
mask. *Why even bother?* the boy
wonders. The night's only
witnesses -- the stars, an ocelot,
a single strand of hair caught
in a barbed wire. Even the zopilotes
won't eat the glut of the unsayable.
The blood-birds hiss and grunt
while a man with pointed teeth
whistles a love song. Why waste
time with metaphors? The body
is kindling. The body is a plastic
bouquet shriveled at a crossing.
The trees bow and weep, but
everybody knows the rains revises
nothing, the charred bones belong

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to no one. Beyond the verdant
mountain, a caravan of mothers
and fathers beg a cankered country
for the locus of cruelty. Farther,
a troop of camouflaged men burn
fields of red poppies --- those lovely
flowers of happiness and squalor.