

## The Legend Garrett Hongo

In Chicago, it is snowing softly  
and a man has just done his wash for the week.  
He steps into the twilight of early evening,  
carrying a wrinkled shopping bag  
5 full of neatly folded clothes,  
and, for a moment, enjoys  
the feel of warm laundry and crinkled paper,  
flannellike against his gloveless hands.  
There's a Rembrandt glow on his face,  
10 a triangle of orange in the hollow of his cheek  
as a last flash of sunset  
blazes the storefronts and lit windows of the street.  
He is Asian, Thai or Vietnamese,  
and very skinny, dressed as one of the poor  
15 in rumpled suit pants and a plaid mackinaw,  
dingy and too large.  
He negotiates the slick of ice  
on the sidewalk by his car,  
opens the Fairlane's back door,  
20 leans to place the laundry in,  
and turns, for an instant,  
toward the flurry of footsteps  
and cries of pedestrians  
as a boy—that's all he was—  
25 backs from the corner package store  
shooting a pistol, firing it,  
once, at the dumbfounded man  
who falls forward,  
grabbing at his chest.  
30 A few sounds escape from his mouth,  
a babbling no one understands  
as people surround him  
bewildered at his speech.  
The noises he makes are nothing to them.  
35 The boy has gone, lost  
in the light array of foot traffic  
dappling the snow with fresh prints.  
Tonight, I read about Descartes'  
grand courage to doubt everything  
40 except his own miraculous existence  
and I feel so distinct  
from the wounded man lying on the concrete  
I am ashamed.  
Let the night sky cover him as he dies.  
45 Let the weaver girl cross the bridge of heaven  
IN MEMORY OF JAY KASHIWAMURA

## miss rosie

### Lucille Clifton

when i watch you  
wrapped up like garbage  
sitting, surrounded by the smell  
of too old potato peels  
5 or  
when i watch you  
in your old man's shoes  
with the little toe cut out  
sitting, waiting for your mind  
10 like next week's grocery  
i say  
when i watch you  
you wet brown bag of a woman  
who used to be the best looking gal in georgia  
15 used to be called the Georgia Rose  
i stand up  
through your destruction  
i stand up

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## Making Meanings

### First Thoughts

1. In “The Legend” and “miss rosie,” we meet two figures seen briefly on city streets. How do you feel about each of these people?

### Shaping Interpretations

2. In “The Legend,” an ordinary street scene is suddenly transformed by a tragic event. How would you describe the poem's tone? In other words, what is the poet's attitude toward the event he's made into a poem? List some of the words, phrases, and details that you think create the tone.

3. Read Hongo's explanation of how he came to write “The Legend” (see Connections). Do you think the poem expresses what he wants it to? Talk about Hongo's comment about needing mercy.

4. Which figure of speech in “miss rosie” do you think is most powerful? What picture of Miss Rosie does it create for you?

5. The idiom “I stand up,” used twice, gives the most important clue to how the writer wants us to feel about Miss Rosie. What does standing up in the face of Miss Rosie's destruction mean? (What does it make you see?) Why do you think the speaker is moved to “stand up” for Miss Rosie?

6. In a way, Miss Rosie seems to represent something more than herself, something never named. What do you think she might symbolize?

### Extending the Text

7. What contemporary urban problems come alive in these poems by Hongo and Clifton? Do most people feel the way these poets felt about these problems? Talk about the ways in which people like Miss Rosie and events like the one in “The Legend” are regarded by society. (You may want to refer to your Quickwrite notes for “miss rosie.”)

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