

[Barbara LaMorticella: Two Poems](#) [1]

May 21, 2014 [Featured Poetry](#) [2]

Cracked

My mother's face was cracked in two as she lay dying:
I hung in her left eye as if in a fisheye lens,
hung upside down wearing a wedding hat,
until her upwelling tear washed my reflection away.
But her right eye was somewhere else, already gone,
all the lovely green disappeared, the white like a cooked egg,
and in the center the pupil square as a TV.

It must have been a program of the '40s or '50s
playing on the black-and-white screen—
maybe one featuring an ice queen and a whore
or the Army General who'd said if you gave him enough bullets
and enough cigarettes, he would win any war.

On the home front all the women were tough
and free enough to smoke. The ads said,
"You've come a long way, baby."
They got to keep the cigarettes, but not
the toughness after the men came home.

The men, as usual, got to keep the war.

When my father lay dying, they pumped gallons of war from him,
dirty war like rusty radiator fluid. With the last living breaths his
lungs drew, he asked, "Am I going to beat this, Doc?"

Then he said, "My squadron is looking for me," and died.



On a Night Heavy with Water

"The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume." —Tony Hayward, BP CEO

Tell that to the great egrets and laughing gulls.
Whisper that to the blue herons,
the muskrat, the alligators.
Reassure the fishermen, the ladyfish.
Croon it to the burning whale.
Tell that to the sickened workers,
to their children and grandchildren.

The men on the beaches in clean slacks
tell flaming lies. Water, our mother, lies flaming
at the introitus of land and the sea.

In the season of heavy water,
a moving finger writes a message that dolphins
read, as they rise full length out of the water
to watch the world they live in
burn.

Publishing Information

- "[BP Boss Admits Job on the Line over Gulf Oil Spill](#)" [3] by Tim Webb, *Guardian*, May 13, 2010.

Art Information

- "[Gulf of Mexico](#)" [4] © Brian Jeffery Beggerly; Creative Commons license.



Barbara LaMorticella lives in a cabin in the woods outside Portland, Oregon. A founding member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, she's a longtime poetry host on KBOO. Her second collection of poems, *Rain on Waterless Mountain*, was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. She's the winner of a Bumbershoot Big Book Award, the first Northwest Poets Concord prize, the Holbrook Award for Outstanding Contributions to Oregon Literary Arts, and the first Oregon Literary Association fellowship for women writers.

Retired from medical transcribing, she cares for her grandchildren, hosts radio, and works for fundamental health care reform.

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