

## *The Middle East:*

# Will We Go To War?

The United States, in spring of 1975, may go to war to seize the oil of Arabia. This idea is now sweeping through what passes for informed circles, and is being accepted by the American public with equanimity—in some cases with glee,

in others almost with relief, and with no discernible sense of horror. Of course I cannot prove that this is the willful intent of the U.S. But consider Kissinger's warning at the start of 1975 that he could not rule out the use of force if the oil producers initiated "some actual strangulation of the industrial world." This was echoed only two weeks later by President Ford, who emphasized that strangulation is the key word. "Strangulation, if you translate it into the terms of a human being, means that you are just about on your back."

Of more than passing interest is that Dr. Kissinger specifically referred to the strangulation of industrial Europe and Japan. This thoroughly confused many who pondered his statement. Did he mean the U.S., in effect, was exempt from possible strangulation if the Arab oil embargo were resumed? Superficially, that would seem to

be his meaning. But closer examination casts the gravest of doubts upon this interpretation. It casts doubt, in fact, upon what the word strangulation, uttered by these two men of immense power, was really intended to mean.

For what was overlooked by the public at the time of these utterances was an extraordinary event. Saudi Arabia had announced its refusal, henceforth, to sell petroleum to England in exchange for pounds sterling, which, in the Saudis' opinion, was far too unstable a currency to be depended upon to represent the value implicit in a contract price. A leading nation's currency was being rejected as equivalent in dependable value to other nations' physical product. The reason of course was the 20 percent per annum inflation which England is suffering, and resulting downward pressures on sterling in foreign exchange markets.

by Terence McCarthy

This is no mere economic abstraction. It is a matter of the utmost immediate gravity, *actually* involving the possible strangulation of at least part of England's economy. Yet, to the confusion of American news analysts, Saudi Arabia simultaneously announced that it had no intention of drawing down its massive sterling balances from London.

Contradictory? In appearance only. The sterling which Saudi Arabia was refusing was a very different sterling from what it had been previously getting for its oil. Earlier, England had guaranteed payment for oil in sterling equivalent to its foreign exchange value measured in a package of other currencies—i.e. a reasonably stable purchasing power. Suddenly, England announced that it would no longer index sterling *vis à vis* other currencies—and it was this unguaranteed sterling, of undependable world value, which Saudi Arabia refused to accept in payment for petroleum. Saudi Arabia's sterling deposits, on the other hand, were already guaranteed in terms of other currencies. There was simply no reason for them to be drawn down.

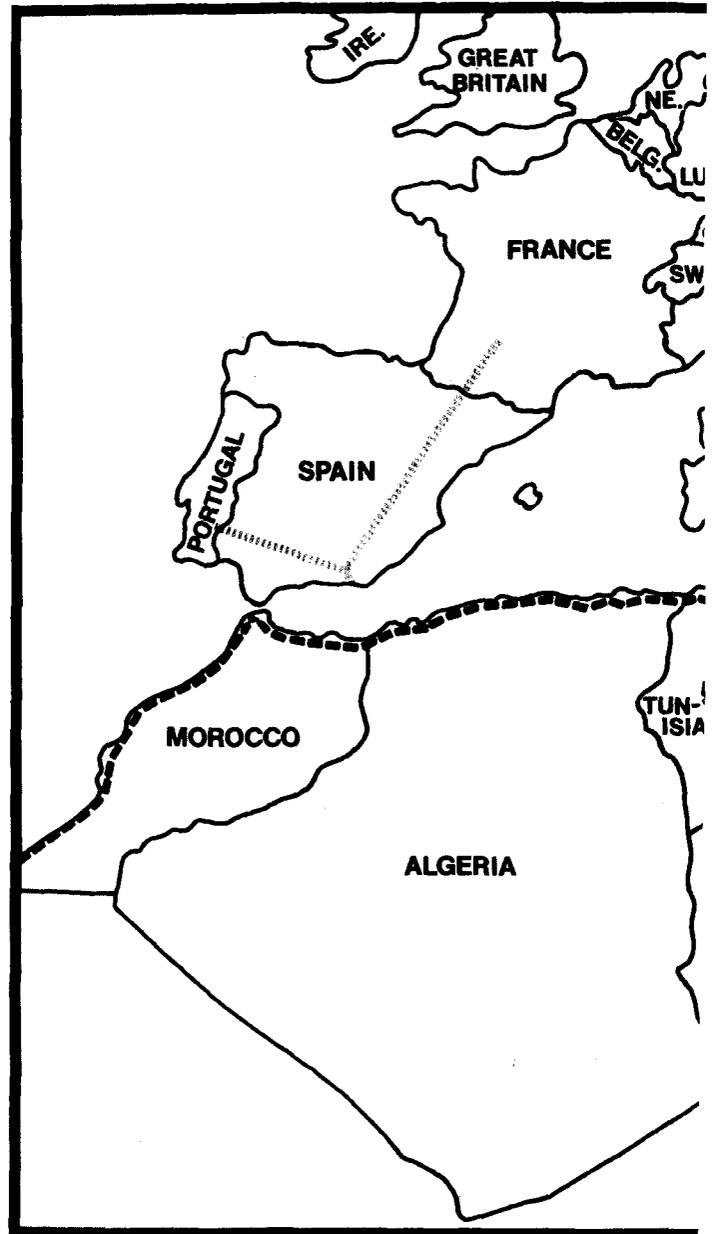
Clearly, if a refusal by oil producers to accept payment in currencies of shrinking values were to extend to still more currencies than sterling, chaos could result for some countries. Was this likely? Would the yen, or the dollar, receive comparable treatment? If so, could this produce anything approaching the strangulation of industry to which America's president and secretary of state have each referred? The answer is given by developments.

According to Clyde H. Farnsworth of the *New York Times* (1/24/75) the sudden fall in the foreign exchange value of the dollar (2.1 percent in French francs; 2.4 percent in westmarks; 3.4 percent in Swiss francs; 2.0 percent in lire; 1.0 percent in sterling—all in the single week ending 1/24/75; and a 12-month fall of 18.3 percent in French francs; 18.4 percent in westmarks; 28.6 percent in Swiss francs; 5.4 percent in lire; 7.8 percent in sterling) has led some oil-exporting countries to begin contemplating treating the dollar as Saudi Arabia has treated unguaranteed sterling. The dollar may be rejected as an acceptable currency through which to effectuate oil sales and purchases. Unconfirmed reports have it that Algeria has already reached a decision, and Kuwait may follow suit, not to sell petroleum for dollars.

This is strangulation in the Kissinger meaning of the term. If the dollar follows sterling in being rejected as acceptable payment for oil, and most surely if this becomes a full OPEC decision, the world will be thrust into immediate turmoil.

For sterling and the dollar are the principal transaction currencies through which oil sales and purchases are effected. And it is difficult to foresee the dollar regaining stability in foreign exchange markets (i.e., acceptability as probably ranging in value within a very narrow trading band) in light of Mr. Ford's call for a \$109 billion increase in the national debt ceiling, and a \$46-50 billion anticipated federal deficit for this year. In fact, Switzerland has imposed a 40 percent per annum negative interest charge upon all new dollar deposits in Swiss banks, if these deposits translate themselves into Swiss francs.

Moreover, from present best evidence, the OPEC countries are very reluctant, and may refuse, to accept payments

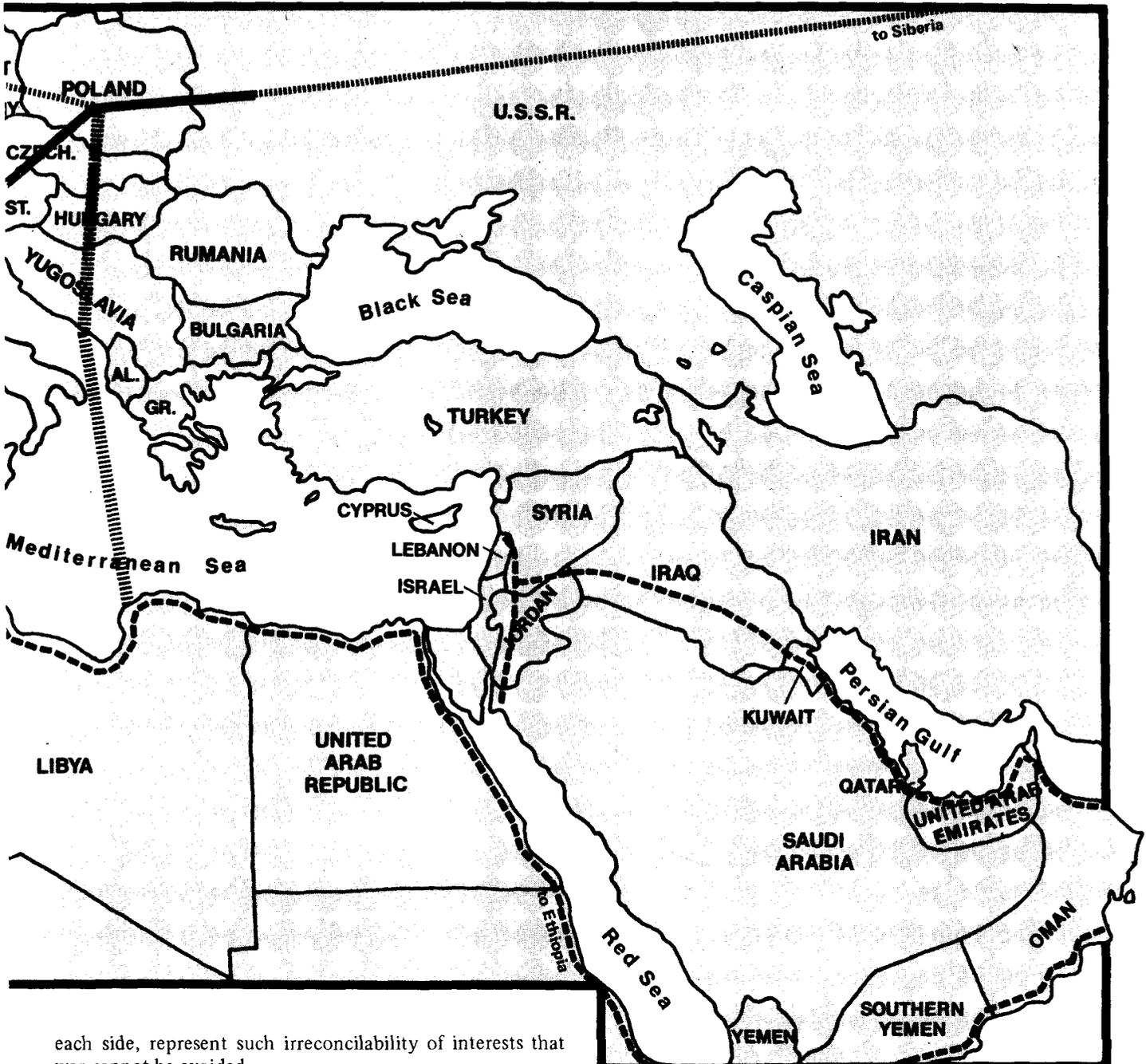


for oil in gold unless the transaction price reflects a minimum drop of 25 percent in the price of gold, and perhaps as much as 30+ percent fall in gold—i.e., the equivalent of the price at which West Germany mortgaged Italy's gold to support the lira when it was in trouble.

[NAKED CONFRONTATION]

**T**hus what is in the making is the most naked of confrontations. On the one hand, an OPEC refusal to sell oil to England or to the United States in exchange for their national currencies. On the other hand, an obstinate insistence by England and the U.S. that, whatever the price for oil set by OPEC, it must be sold for national currencies at their face value at transaction date.

These national attitudes, if maintained obdurately by



each side, represent such irreconcilability of interests that war cannot be avoided.

This is the crux of the matter. If war comes, it will not only be over the question of oil, but over the question of paper money—the paper money of the outworn imperial power (England) and the paper money of the fumbling, as yet unsuccessful, new imperial power (the U.S.).

The danger of war is therefore real and imminent. What the world now faces is the possibility of a universal breakdown in the customary mechanism of world trade such that, as currency after currency follows sterling and the dollar into unacceptability, international movement of fuels may cease. Whether or not OPEC in 1975 posts the dollar as an unacceptable currency is secondary to the fact that this danger now hangs over the dollar, and will increase, not decrease, as the domestic and foreign ex-

### TOWARDS A MEDITERRANEAN COMMONWEALTH

Current plans for a highway and oil pipeline network that would tie together Europe, North Africa and the Middle East in a new Mediterranean civilization.

- existing pipeline from USSR to Italy
- ||||| agreed-upon pipeline from Libya to Poland
- ..... projected pipelines
- - - - - planned route of trans-Arabian highway  
(all routes are approximate)

“The simplest, straightest path towards assuring that Arab currencies will not grow to dominate the world monetary system is to go to war. What can be seized need not be bought—and nothing seems simpler than that.”

change value of the dollar declines. This danger has already been posited for the dollar and effectuated for sterling. The confrontation, in effect, has occurred.

The situation, however, is not quite as simple as this analysis may seem to imply. OPEC has uttered no threat—nor even implied one—that it will cease to ship petroleum in exchange for paper money *per se*. What it has done in the case of sterling, and implied for the dollar, is that it may decide to ship petroleum only in return for a balanced package of foreign exchange more or less guaranteed as to purchasing power. There is talk, in fact, of the creation of a sort of OPEC currency, based on the value of the collective trading surpluses of the OPEC countries, in which OPEC will demand purchasing countries pay for their oil.

In effect, this would put the world monetary systems on a petroleum base of value, the “black gold” system advocated by some theorists in the United States as long ago as 1943.

Politically, this would be intolerable for advanced industrial powers already unable to meet either their internal or external debts. But Occam’s Razor applies as much in politics as the laws of the Universe. The simplest adequate hypothesis must take precedence over, and exclude, more complicated formulations. And the simplest, straightest path towards assurance that Arab currencies will not grow to dominate the world monetary system is to go to war. What can be seized need not be bought—and nothing seems simpler than that.

#### [A DESPERATE SCENARIO]

**H**ow will the war start? By an Israeli attack on Syria, perhaps in May of this year. This is the expectation of large numbers of Israelis now in this country. It is not voiced as an idle speculation. The Israeli theory is that war with Syria would be Israel’s *last* war, that Israel would stake its existence on it, that if Israel were to vanish in defeat this would be the will of God.

The Israelis, however, do not expect to be defeated. They appear confident not only in their vast military superiority over Syria but that they could defeat the joint forces of Syria and Iraq—which they expect to have to face. One trump card they think to be in hand is that if Iraq becomes deeply involved in war, the Kurdish rising now underway in Iraq would become general. Iraq would thus have to fight a two-front war, with Israeli assistance to the heavily armed Kurds in Iraq’s mountains. Israel hopes to fight on only one land front with Syria, and to give aerial support to the Kurds.

It is taken for granted by the Israelis that the U.S. would come to their assistance in case of need. Their thesis, in fact, is that the U.S. would move, probably simultaneously with Israeli military action, against at least one other Arab state—a petroleum producer, of course. What seems to be in their thinking is that Libya and/or Algeria would be the U.S. target. If this thesis is correct, it means that Israel would be almost guaranteed a one-front war with Syria. Egypt, in this context, is not regarded as negligible, but some Egyptian advance into the Sinai, it is assumed, would have to be conceded by Israel even if war were not to occur. Even as Israel races to strengthen its fortifications in the Sinai, diplomatic pressures are all in that direction.

The trouble with this Israeli-U.S. thesis is that it makes unvoiced assumptions which need to be voiced and, in any case, are questionable.

First, it assumes that although Algeria and/or Libya might blow up their oil installations in case of U.S. invasion, the other Arab states not subject to U.S. attack would not do so. It is this idea which underlies America’s apparent strategic postulate that the Army Corps of Engineers could restart the oil flow in six weeks or so after the end of the fighting.

This is a very dangerous assumption. It presupposes that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman would sit by quietly, concede U.S.-Israeli victory by proxy, and grudgingly continue to pump out oil to meet the world’s needs. This could, of course, occur. The probability, in my opinion, is that it would not occur. The Arab oil producers are not mere merchants intent on extracting the highest possible price for the highest possible quantity of their natural resources. They are—or believe themselves to be—engaged in a crusade, a recrudescence of their days of strength and independence in the days of Saladin. It therefore cannot be ruled out that, if the U.S. successfully invades a single Arab oil-producing nation, all the oil wells, refineries, pipelines, storage facilities, harbor installations, etc., of all Arab oil producers will at once be destroyed.

Unthinkable? By no means. If the Israelis are capable of thinking of one last, and perhaps suicidal, war, why should their cousins, the Arabs, be incapable of similar thought? And if the Israelis and the U.S. are prepared to take the risk of initiating what could become a global conflict, why should the Arabs—once faced with the certainty of defeat piecemeal—give any thought whatever to the consequences upon Europe and Japan if they destroy their oil resources? Those consequences will be the virtual death of the industrial civilizations of Europe and Japan—which, one must assume, are considered expendable in the calculations of

the Israeli-U.S. war machine.

There are still further possible miscalculations. The problem of the Kurds is not confined to Iraq. There are large—and discontented—Kurdish minorities in the U.S.S.R., Turkey and Iran. A U.S.-Israeli-Kurdish victory over Iraq and Syria would rouse the latent nationalist enthusiasm of these minorities, i.e., would pose an immediate threat of possible risings in Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union.

Viewed dispassionately, the possibility therefore exists that these three countries would not stand idle while this danger to them was in the making. Turkey and Iran, and possibly the Soviet Union, might be drawn into the fighting to prevent a Kurdish victory in Iraq. This, I believe, has not been thoroughly weighed by Israel, and has not been weighed at all by Kissinger.

Further still, it is to be doubted that Israel could defeat Syria in the mountain terrain of Mt. Hermon unless Israel strikes soon. Israel appears to be at, or very close to, the peak of its military capabilities. Syria is probably not yet at its peak but, with the enormous input of Soviet weaponry and training, grows stronger and more bold day by day.

It is therefore to the advantage of Israel to strike early, as soon as the frost and the spring runoffs are off Mt. Hermon, i.e., no later than the end of May. The terrain would then be favorable for armored attack, with full air support—the necessary preconditions for an Israeli victory in this sector.

In addition, it must not be forgotten that Israel has boasted, not vainly in my opinion, that nuclear capabilities are now featured in its arsenal. Moreover, the U.S. administration has informed Congress of the imminent sale to Israel of 200 Lance short-range ballistic missiles, adaptable for use in nuclear bombardment. Israeli protestations to the contrary, it is against logic to expect the Israelis not to employ their limited number of tactical nuclear warheads if the coming war should go against them, putting them *in extremis* as a nation.

#### [ON THERMONUCLEAR WAR]

It is here that lies the heart of mankind's military plight. Any use of nuclear weapons, tactical or strategic, to overcome the advantages of Soviet-supplied arms anywhere (or U.S. arms for that matter), could lead to immediate entry of Russia into the conflict. The question is therefore posed whether the coming U.S.-Israeli military gamble against Arabia might lead not only to global war but to a nuclear war (in the full sense of the term) between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

There is at least a 50 percent likelihood of the answer being yes.

This is a change of view on my part from the opinions I expressed in "The New International Power Game" (RAMPARTS, Nov. 1973). The view I then held was that a full nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would, in effect, annihilate both countries.

I now hold the view that the U.S.S.R. is in a far superior position to survive a nuclear attack than is this country. Western Russia, even for some distance beyond the Urals, and the coastal areas and naval and industrial installations

of the maritime regions of Siberia, would suffer total destruction. There would surely be erasure of cities, industries, and transport facilities in many cities, in other parts of Russia. But most of rural Russia, and its population, would survive—and that means that the Russians would survive. A smashed and riven Russia, it is true, but a living Russia nonetheless, measured in terms of surviving mankind.

Russia would have to start its industrial revolution, even its civilization, all over again. The reasonable presumption for the farming areas which did survive is that life would be highly localized, perhaps even as primitive as before World War I when archaic Russian agriculture permitted her to be a net grain exporter to the world. My expectation is that local but extensive political entities would emerge which might, or equally might not, coalesce into larger political unities tending over time to become once more a unified nation in its habitable regions.

I make no apology for presenting in callous and obviously inhumane terms estimates which no civilized human being should ever be called upon to make. The circumstances require that civilized men and women make such estimates. It is, in fact, a badge of humaneness that one engage in these exercises—in public, for others to scrutinize and to reject, modify, or draw conclusions from. For what appears to be in prospect is the antithesis of humaneness. It is malevolent antihumanity at its most despicable. Science and scientists have debased themselves in search of annihilation of the human race. We are in an age of diabolism honored by the mighty, applauded by the multitude. The 60 million dead of World War II are paltry in the counting of today's nations. Deaths by the billion are the possible accomplishment of 1975.

For all that Russia needs to do is to atomize not the cities and the industries, nor even the power stations, but only the power distribution system.

Then the water would cease to flow. Even my home 2,000 feet up in the Catskill Mountains, far removed from any industry other than logging and dairy farming, would be instantly uninhabitable. Our water pump, some 700 feet down in the earth, is electrically powered. We could, it is true, carry water by the pailful from the stream half a mile down the mountainside—if we were not aging, and if we had the strength. But our sump pump, which diverts and discharges runoff waters which otherwise would inundate our cellar and wash away our home's foundations, is also electrically powered. And our farm equipment requires electric power for its repair, maintenance, and use. We might manage for awhile in the forest if our crops were in.

But—a new poverty phenomenon—crop raids have already begun in these mountains, especially of garden produce. There are similar reports from the West Coast. Also, and possibly a portent for the cities as well as the countryside, arson is becoming common. In one recent case, seven buildings in a nearby village were burned down in one night, the arsonists setting another house afire as soon as the volunteer village fire department was wholly occupied in extinguishing an earlier advanced blaze.

If this is already happening in the mountains in conditions not of war but of heightening poverty and tensions,

(Continued on page 59)

# Poems by Erica Jong

## STATUE

*Cement up to the neck  
& my head packed  
with unsaid words.  
A gullet full of pebbles,  
a mouth  
of cast concrete –  
I am stuck  
in a lovelessness so thick,  
it seems my natural element.  
My mouth closes  
on stones.*

*Hand frozen to my chin,  
my back a question mark,  
my heart soldered  
to its arteries,  
my feet planted  
in grass that cannot grow,  
The Thinker ponders  
ten more years of this:  
a woman  
living the life  
of a statue.*

*Break free!  
Melt the metal  
in love's cauldron,  
open doors, eyes, heart,  
those frozen ventricles,  
those stuck tongues,  
those stuttering dependencies.*

*When the statue walks,  
will the world dissolve?  
When she shakes her shoulders  
will the sky shrug  
& skitter off in space?*

*Or will the clouds cluster  
to cover her,  
& the blue wind gather  
at her shoulders  
& the men streak by  
like jet trails in the air,  
utterly ephemeral?*