

about the size of  
two beer cans so  
then the senator asked  
well clarence is that  
eight ounces or twelve  
ounces the american people  
need to know facts  
they are so deprived  
not depraved just deprived

to elegies of mystical proportions in grains of sand:

then i turned  
  
and flew  
down the dale  
  
in the late  
sunset light  
  
the air  
was full  
  
of blackbird dust

One seems as depraved as its subject, the other as spiritually charged as it is frightening. The truth is Williams despises depravity and embraces moral amplitude, an Emersonian stance with the Zen sight of all-in-one — reminding us as Shelley once stated: “Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted” or Teilhard de Chardin’s “Whatever happens is to be adored.” Williams adores human frailty and eccentricity — for it reveals us as we are — raging against a universe aiming to disintegrate and yet desiring to become.

Williams offers a rich coffer of judgements and celebrations of American and British late-twentieth century artists. Among the essays subjects are outsiders such as Ernest Mickler (author of *White Trash Cooking*); visionary poets Alfred Starr Hamilton, James Broughton, and Ronald Johnson; outsider artists James Harold Jennings, “cartoonist” Bill Anthony, and poet Spike Hawkins; photographers Clarence John Laughlin, Ray Moore, Harry Callahan, and Art Sinsabaugh; modernists geniuses Basil Bunting, James Laughlin, Robert Duncan, Kenneth Patchen, Joel Oppenheimer, and Lorine Niedecker; a little mini-survey of his favorite overlooked books called “The Moon Pool and Others” in the style of Henry Miller’s *Books in My Life* or Pound’s *ABC’s of Reading*; poems in Williams’s “new” form the meta-four (the only rule each line must have four words); contemporary visual artists James McGarrell and Ian Gardner; a wildly funny yet fact-filled self-interview; photographs of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, mountain roadside graffiti, Kenneth Patchen, Carl Ruggles and others; and irate letters to the *New York Times Book Review* and the (London) *Spectator*.

Williams never fails to entertain while instructing. Once called by critic Hugh Kenner “The Custodian of Snowflakes” Williams continues to find the “high” hidden in the “low.” Testimony to his brilliance, wit, and ability to appreciate is this from a memorial to a Highlands friend Virginia Randall Wilcox (known as “Ted” to her friends): “Even a few weeks ago, with hardly any voice left and sadly confined to a wheelchair, Ted looked exactly like Queen Elizabeth the First of England, ready to read the riot act at one and all: NO FOOLISHNESS! Get on with the business of leading your life. George Bernard Shaw defined a lady or a gentleman as someone who treated everyone the same. I’ve known miles of snobs and people convinced they are better than you and me, but I have met few ladies and gentlemen. Ted was one of the first.” Only a mind such as Williams could follow this tender loving essay with one about Patchen which saunters by Robert Mitchum, Allen Ginsberg, James Dickey, Dean Koontz, John Grisham, Danielle Steele, Camus, and Babe Ruth while praising Patchen’s ability for “Severity, gravity, and wistful sadness.”

If you read one book this year and want to EXPAND your consciousness and sensibility, this is the book. Buy it.

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*evaporate again*  
C. A. Conrad.  
Mooncalf Press, 2000.  
22 pages. \$5.00 (paperback).

C.A. Conrad joins Garni, Hamilton, and Edson as master practitioners of the self-ennobling fable, but with a mystical sensual-body feel honed from a Queer sensibility. These seventeen minimalist poems pack a big punch:

I introduce the new hair  
on my leg  
to the rest of itself

we’re so much  
water we’re clouds  
when we die

*evaporate again* elegizes a loved one gone. It curses the cruelty of death and the finality of grief:

you said  
hold your  
hand out for my  
weight tonight for what  
falls from me

my hand cupped could

hold what's left of you

Each of these poems brought me to tears. They carry Queer memory of the Plague with a pungency ever more rich than more formalized poems could — for their brevity mirrors the fleeting path of love, of life, and of sorrow:

sun trapped in  
watermelon rinds I eat  
lights my head at night

The Jargon Society intends to publish a more substantial collection of Conrad poems. Send them a tax-deductible contribution (P.O. Drawer 10, Highlands, North Carolina, 28741). Conrad's a poet to cheer on, cheer with, and catch on.

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*Economy of the Unlost.*

Anne Carson.

Princeton University Press, 1999.

147 pages. \$29.95 (hardcover).

*Men in the Off Hours.*

Anne Carson.

Knopf, 2000.

167 pages. \$24.00 (hardcover).

In two recent works poet and classicist Anne Carson continues her tender assault on the American mind. Extending essay into poetry, and poetry into philosophical and linguistic experiment, Carson's work seeks the hidden with willful, guerrilla-like, and joyous abandonment without sacrificing sense or sensibility. She makes remarkable and graspable the difficult, while celebrating simple truths with aplomb. Reflection is her mother lode and re-positing her aim. She makes new the boring. She winnows beauty from language.

In the *Economy of the Unlost*, in hand with the ancient Greek poet Simonides and the Romanian Jewish poet Paul Celan, Carson ponders loss, economy, the unseen, and the unspoken through negativity, death, alienation, despair, heartbreak, self-definition, and retrieval. In its epilogue she reflects: "Yet a few pages ago we read and made sense of Celan's admonition, 'Keep Yes and No unsplit.' A word for 'Yes and No' might be useful. Poets keep coming up with these useful inventions; we have seen both Celan and Simonides constructing a word for 'Yes and No' out of the operations of the negative, out of the absent presence of gods in human rooms, out of alchemy, out of memory, out of the rules for elegiac meter and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, out of strangeness, hospitality, sleep, prayer, and commodity

exchange. But to be useful, poetic invention has to measure itself against the words that are given and possible, has to tease itself out of the unknown through a language mesh where everything ugly, blameworthy, incommensurable or mad is filtered out." Carson's point: that the poet's ability to praise, at all cost, saves us, enlarges us, and teaches us to see beyond to a freedom of Being which is easily lost in the material world.

As a moral prophet, Carson yearns for a civilized society of energetic, emotive, and intellectually curious citizens. Her dissection of poetic and aesthetic thinking with all its fascinating and challenging twists and turns of phrase, its witticisms, and awkward glances at the human, serves a larger purpose — acts, itself, as a metaphor for self-knowledge. As Simonides and Celan respond to the world's absences and losses, Carson interrogates their work and gives form, defines the forms, of emptiness, in which they lived and wrote. Fascinated by the "bottomless places for reading" she finds in the literature of negation, excision, emptiness, and denial, "economy" becomes in her hands a multi-layered term which tells us not only about the exchange of money for art; but also suffering for wisdom; and emptiness and negation for assertion and fullness. For her Simonides and Celan "make use of the void in order to think the full."

Anne Carson questions how poorly the world compensates for literature. It's not money she wants, but rather proof — that the world show by active response that literature does not exist in a vacuum. She exclaims, "Where can we go for news of truth? To words. The poet's words remain. His words hold gold. In words he knows how to clear away everything ugly, blameworthy, incommensurable or mad and manifest what is worth praise."

*Men in the Off Hours* rises up from Carson's determined poetics to challenge the reader to regard Time as simultaneous. *Men* begins obsessed by Time and ends as an elegy to her mother who died while she was writing it. Loss permeates these pages as in her lucidly sharp reworking of Catullus: "As tree shapes from mist / Her young death / Loose / In you." ("If Anything to the Silent Grave") She brings Thucydides and Virginia Woolf together in the book's opening essay to reflect on war's horrible normalcy and time's soldierly attack on the living. She plays Edward Hopper paintings reconstructed as poems against quotations from St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

In the sequence "TV Men" she imagines a film-set where the lives of characters such as Antonin Artaud and Tolstoy are dissected with post-modernist inquisitiveness. The poems meld psychological detritus with visual beauty as in this scene between Tolstoy and his wife: "In sex (he told her) the mind evaporates and suddenly / the body is there. / just the body with its reaches. / He