

who can drink and dart with men like him who have out of necessity made the choices that suit them best: "Well maybe / Like the sniper said it's Hemingway / Or Bukowski or nothing, 'These are // My guys,' he said, 'these are / My guys,' claiming cock of the dunghill / Rights for the twentieth century . . ." The sniper's claim, and the assertions of this poem, go far beyond ordinary poetry.

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*Ancestors.*

Kamau Brathwaite.

New Directions, 2001.

544 pages. \$35.00 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Keith Mitchell*

With the advent of postcolonial studies, the work of Caribbean authors has begun to impact the world of *belles lettres*. One of the most exciting works is *Ancestors*, a sweeping historical epic in the vein of Dante or Milton, by the Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite.

Brathwaite divides the poem into three sections, "Mother Poem," "Sun Poem," and "X/Self," and then smaller sections containing individual poems. This structure confirms the universality of the poem while creating an engaging intimacy. The relationships between three "voices," the mother, the narrator/son, and the father in relation to the Motherland (Barbados) overarch the theme of familial integration and separation.

"Alpha," the first poem in the collection, connects the narrator's mother to Barbados's majesty — a place where "my mother rains upon the island / w/her loud voices / w/her grey hairs / w/her green love." Brathwaite equates Barbados' landscape with his mother's indomitable spirit and endurance in the wake of colonial and postcolonial oppression. The first section ends with "Driftwood," culminating in the mother's death, as she becomes the pools of his "island / lime conch lobster flying / fish scales / closing her eyes." The mother "returns" to Barbados's natural setting, which "birthed" her; becoming a metaphor for the physical and spiritual aliment sustaining the narrator / poet.

"Sun Poem," begins with "Red Rising," a mythical evocation to the sun, the giver of life and death. The speaking sun is also metaphor for Barbadian fathers whose only hope for their children is "but that you may live / my fond retreating future." That is, that they may survive and live even as they inevitably move towards death. But in the poem "Son" the narrator believes in the resolute spirit of the Barbadian people when "they say / cerise and orange / and rise- / ing to gold- / en day- / light / they say / rising to blue . . . / and the sun / new." Just as surely as the sun/son rises, so will they.

The final section is titled "X/S" (excess) — subtitled "X/Self." The first poem, "Letter from Roma," is about a son, one of the narrator's ancestors, who has managed, despite racist attitudes, to be elected "the governor of the thirteen provinces." Ancestors then moves to the present day in which the narrator of "X/Self xth letter from the thirteen provinces," muses about the miracles of technology, and more importantly, his knowledge of how to use words as weapons, like Caliban, to curse Prospero: "Dear mumma / uh writin yu dis letter / wha? guess what! pun a computer O / kay? . . ." It is the Word which speaks for all of his ancestors, his people who in *The Beginning*, "from this cramped hand / cripple by candlelight / a crab scuttles / its mail'd dragonish swords / . . . and the grass flesh / and the flesh memory / and the memory nodding / . . . coming in with the birds and the wind and the steep stars" ("Carab").

Brathwaite pays homage to people of the African Diaspora who have struggled and continue to struggle against forces that would see them perish. For Brathwaite, as long as people remember those blacks — the seemingly insignificant, the Historically unaccounted for — who struggle(d), then people of African descent will continue to rise like the stars.

\* \* \*

*Re-Sounding: Selected Later Poems.*

Theodore Enslin.

Talisman House, 1999.

129 pages. \$14.95 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Robert West*

Theodore Enslin was born in 1925, and thus belongs to what is surely (to borrow a phrase from Tom Brokaw) the greatest generation of American poets: his peers include the likes of Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, Amy Clampitt, A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, and Robert Creeley . . . one could easily name another equally celebrated ten or so. Yet Enslin has enjoyed little of the spotlight those poets have basked in for most of their lives. To be sure, he has his readers, and he has attracted a modicum of academic criticism: a search of the online MLA bibliography turns up a dozen critical essays on his work. Reading his late poems, it's easy to see why these things would be so.

*Re-Sounding* contains 126 poems, though it takes some doing to figure that out: the table of contents is formatted eccentrically and lacks page numbers. Enslin is at least as concerned with sound as with discursive content, and a number of poems amount to dazzling orchestrations of echoes; consider "Trade Off," which begins, "Winds trade winds and how they trade / the trading of the heat for water always trading / one tern

to tern again the flight a turning trade.” Other poems are brief lessons, such as the extraordinary meditation beginning, “To be of one place as another / is forbidden.” Enslin’s syntax is often both sinuous and halting, and his punctuation is erratic; once in a while a poem apparently intended to make a statement ends up as a puzzle. That said, one should hesitate before dismissing anything here: like all good poems, these demand to be felt out, rehearsed, and inhabited to be appreciated. There are a few people who will give poems such as these the chance they deserve, but only a few.

To be of one place as another  
is forbidden not by law or ritual  
it is of the kind and species.  
Only at the time of its uprooting  
will a tree sense something of its roots  
no longer dark and secret  
in a parent loam.

\* \* \*

*When I Find You Again It Will Be in Mountains:*

*Selected Poems of Chia Tao.*

Translated by Mike O’Connor.

Wisdom Publications, 2000.

140 pages. \$15.95 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Robert West*

Mike O’Connor, a poet from Washington state and a former resident of Taiwan, brings us a scholarly yet compact edition of the late eighth- and early ninth-century Chinese poet Chia Tao. O’Connor’s introduction is quite helpful: it offers a biography of the poet, an overview of his period, and a discussion of his style, and also provides interesting information about the poet’s critical reception. O’Connor has translated 88 of Chia Tao’s 404 extant poems; the English texts are attractively printed next to the Chinese originals, and in four cases are also accompanied by photographs from China by Steven R. Johnson. A brief glossary and twenty pages of endnotes provide help with references to Chinese geography, history, customs, and other matters. A five-page bibliography lists editions of the poet’s work and translations of it, as well as a number of works of general interest to students of Chinese poetry. You couldn’t hope for a more inviting introduction to Chia Tao, who is less well known in the Occident than his eighth-century predecessors Li Po, Tu Fu, and Wang Wei. My sole complaint about the book’s format is the lack of an index; any future edition should include one.

Classic Chinese poetry abounds with poems of farewell and travel, and that is certainly true of Chia Tao’s work. A former monk, he also often writes about visits with monks and hermits; O’Connor notes that

the frequency of this choice of topic distinguishes his oeuvre from those of earlier poets. He also points out that stylistically Chia Tao’s poetry is marked by a new concern for *le mot juste*, a concern likewise evident in O’Connor’s fine English versions. If there is any shortcoming to the translations, it is that they give little sense of attempting to duplicate the sound effects of the originals — effects, such as rhyme, that O’Connor describes in his introduction. But of course this is a problem each translator deals with in his own way; to translate is “to bring across,” and such smuggling always involves one compromise or another.

“Seeking but Not Finding the Recluse”

Under pines  
I ask the boy;

he says: “My master’s gone  
to gather herbs.

I only know  
he’s on this mountain,

but the clouds are too deep  
to know where.”

\* \* \*

*The Lost Sea.*

Keith Flynn.

Iris Press, 2000.

114 pages. \$13.00 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Mark Roberts*

Perhaps it was the sinuous tails of René Magritte’s candles crawling along the shoreline illustrated on its cover that drew me in, but the poems made me stay. It was snowing when I read *The Lost Sea*, Keith Flynn’s third book of poems, and as I recall, it was near twenty degrees here in my little mountain home. A perfect day, I thought, to endure a different type of accumulation — snowy excerpts from Keith Flynn’s mind. A good decision, I can report.

Thematically, *The Lost Sea* reaches far and wide, from the history and myth of the West, to our intriguing post-modern culture, to the poet’s own personal, contemplative reflections. To match the wide range of themes, there are also a variety of poetic forms presented — dramatic monologues, lyrics, and narratives. Flynn tries his hand at experimental form, too, and when he does, it pays off, particularly with the cycle of poems called “The Fatigue of Post-Modern Irony.”

“Waco Ruby Ridge Oklahoma” is a poem from the “Fatigue” cycle that reveals how our society increas-