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Thom C. Jones

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Struggle

Poetry by Thomas C. Jones

Thomas Jones
5-92

Struggle

A Collection of Poetry
by, Thomas C. Jones

Thesis for Southern Illinois University
University Honors Program
1992
Thesis Director, Rodney Jones

Struggle

Struggle

Poems by Thomas C. Jones, collected 1992

One

1. A Sissy at Family Dinner
2. Cleopatra
3. The Evenings and Nights of Cole Porter
Years After the Accident
4. Talking with a Hitchhiker
While Pumping Gas at a Station
Outside of Town
5. O Heavy Horse
6. Blanche DuBois

Two

7. Spring For My Grandfather
8. The Lettuce Bird
9. Inspiration

Three

10-15 5 Voices

Four

16. Angels
17. Holy Endurance
18. King Coon's Day

Five

19. Moonsliver, baby
20. Husband Hunting

One

A Sissy at Family Dinner

We wear the mask that grins and lies...
Paul Laurence Dunbar

I wear the weight of my life
draped along my skinny shoulder-line
like a yoke-styled stole. At dinner,
with bowls of black-eyed peas, lettuce glaring
with oil and vinegar, roasted beefs plain
on family plates, all the silverware sharpened
on the whetstone tongues and pallets of father
mother grandfather aunt uncle, here I pose myself,
a numb boy in a chair; or hide myself, a little fool
masturbating in a corner.

I wear the weight of my life
and don't wince in the face of anybody; strong
in mute calm, not belonging to the family
I was born into, but screwed to their table, plump
as a dumpling, smiling like a pig's head; I am here,
prepared, whipped and buttered; I am sleeping in the soup,
the beef heart that makes the turtle mock; my lungs
are fish out of water, breathing asthmatic
as gospel static in the black iron skillet,
never in song,
but in an even unaffected hum
under the breath of this house at dinner.

Cleopatra

I saw Claudette Colbert when I was eight
years old and said my death will come
in a basket of snakes. Everywhere, I saw asps,
in babydoll bottles, crowding
toward the nipple; I saw them as African
beans, long and sullen in my mother's soup,
darting at her when the spoon broke
the surface, biting her tongue and coiling
into a mouthful of viscous spit curls;
I saw them fastened around my father's
wrists, under the starched cuffs of the shirt
the mortician picked out, scouring
off the bland makeup to expose simple
scars, fastidiously cut.

Elizabeth Taylor in 1964 lounged with Richard
Burton and I was married
to a man weak like my father, baking hams
and cobblers, crying for babies,
groping my pregnant stomach from behind
as if *he* was carrying. I could snap
my fingers and he would dance like Cleopatra's
chorus line of girls clad in their Egyptian
gowns of golden cutlery; and I would laugh,
lift my maternity blouse and say Dance,
you idiot, dance for the kingdom
you can never know. I didn't want
the child, I didn't want my breasts
too swollen to force into the mouths
of asps, small as keyholes; I wanted
to die before I let any part of myself
be taken, even by a weak man.

Thomas C. Jones

The Evenings and the Nights of Cole Porter
Years After the Accident

1.

Across the shoulder of a young valet,
his legs dangle like jelly-blooded nerves
unnerved. Society friends pace the hall
with black-tie poise- Truman, Kitty Carlisle-
convened at this iron lung of a suite
only to wait for their crippled host
to be carried, propped like a Queen Anne chair
at the dining room table. Pallid-tongued
for his Waldorf pageant, host Cole doesn't speak
finding his guests' gossip flat as spoiled cordial.

But he keeps his high-town style, his suit sealed
tight as an envelope, with lap blankets
veneering his dead-fish thighs as fresh or
solid, the mangled things, their bones crushed to powder,
made love to twice by a riding horse that
rolled over and over on poor Cole Porter.

2.

He crawls with the grain of the floor
to get to the naked actor across the room
who says,
Do you want this cock? Come get this cock.

Under the double-crescent arch of two potent legs
Cole is the size of a small lizard, squat on his stomach,
his eyes revolving up to the man he knows
will step away, baiting Cole with a nightly song- *Drag those
crippled legs like an old bridal train if you want me
tonight.* And Cole does, pulling himself around the room
for half an hour
until the man gives in with gestures
that, in the mind of Cole Porter, lather
the mere julienned slivers of his legs into bulk
he can stand on, upright
and deserving.

Talking with a Hitchhiker
While Pumping Gas at a Station
Outside of Town

I aint going into town, Mister,
I said to this long sassy rifle of a man.
You aint, huh? Alright.
And the numbers rolled over to 5, uh-Hummm.
He stopped, his arms rolling like water
in a halted bucket, *Oobaby,*
say that Umhummm sweetness again!

uh-Hummmmm...

Sounds so good. Whats yo name?
My name dont matter, I said.
Why dont you let me rape you?
You hafta ask permission?
Let me rape you, baby.
Honey, cant rape the willin.
Gimme some a that smile.
What you gon do with it?
Put my stuff in it, thats what.

be Fiiiine.

He wanted to stake some roadside,
unbusy with squad traffic, I got work
right now, I said. (What he carried,
truck stop diseases, city cracked mind-set,
the brazen truth lawzy me between us.)
I got to get rid of this, now. There
an amtrak we could hook at? Yes I
said 10:30 tonight, leaving him, hearing
as I hurried into town, that train
that old train
steaming out of its railroad yard.

O Heavy Horse

I am watching you from the ground, your muscles
moving like suede-masked stratum crashing smoothly
into earthquakes as you run my way as you
carry the man I want

O heavy horse, to know his straddle I'd sell my soul,
his rump solid on my pommeled spine, to have his
girthing legs gall me halt or move, with all god
in his leather-hemmed fist that opens on my neck
like a careening wing.

Heavy horse,

I am watching you through the grass, your gallop
splitting land and shin as he drives you with a handsome
slap; and upon me, I am bent for his mount, but he runs me
down like a hound, cross this hog's back.

O heavy horse, I am knowing the blur of your silk belly;
the piss slapping me is hard applause, and I kiss hoof
after hoof as I am being trampled, chattering and
babbling *I love* and *yes* because I know this is the closest
I will get to your rider.

Blanche DuBois

(for the Midwestern Drag Queen)

I am a big girl,
and like Miss Ross says, *I'm the Boss*,
so come here and suck your mama's
stick-pussy, Mister Burly Man. Don't
make me roll up these sequinned sleeves
and dance your table down
with my new vinyl stilettos size 11½,
I know you gotta hard-on under there.

I feel the earth
move
under my feet,

D.J. play that machine. I'll teach
Mr-John-Deere-straight-man where
to plow his dirty back road, chile.
I ain't some Friday night curiosity
for you heterosexuals to sightsee
and talk over Monday. I am a Queen,
and before the doors close tonight,
Mister, you'll suck this Queen's tit
like a roasting pig with a silicone apple
stuffed in your mouth, spread on the floor
of this proud fiesta, the disco lights
cracking across your back, you'll feel
the sky tumbling down, *tum-buh-ling*
down.

Two

Spring For My Grandfather

April comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.
-Edna St. Vincent Millay

Rough and tumble, she says, diapering
this eighty year old man, her husband, turning him
from left side onto right side. His eyes are set
in the indifferent gaze of the almost dead,
fixed in ignorance as his wife takes a washrag
to his dirty ass. She cries but says
she doesn't mind a bit. She says
now, when the sap comes up in the trees, is a bad time
for the sick. She says that the change in season
is bad for her husband's old bones.

His mind has been spoiling for three years,
lagging behind in afternoon dreams about hospital
rooms, his mother's kitchen, the tavern
he tended since 1950. *Please let's go home,*
he'd holler at his wife, *lock up the safe and let's go,*
the rest of the day, carrying on, refusing
the natural comfort of knowing his own house. Disregarding
the couch, the drapes, dusted photos, everything
but shadows.

Until shadows became cracks spreading into ditches
across the floor, bundles of pajama bottoms in the corner,
crouched thieves hiding under tables. He'd sit up
in his chair talking, pinching folds in the afghan,
giving his hand a tender kiss as if it belonged
to some favored shy grandson. His black-slippered feet
slack on his foot-stool were two little niggers,
he'd say, kicking at them, two negroe children
knocking over furniture.

Open your mouth little bird, she says,
feeding her husband water in a spoon, his throat
tight and thick with phlegm. At first, she says,
I thought he was stubborn not swallowing,
but he just gets choked on the meagerest
taste. The old man keeps his eyes closed,
his pulse is slow, pale skin wilted
on his rawboned face, sunk in at the cheeks.
She says, he's lost so much weight, you think
you could hold him in your hand. And he opens
his mouth for another cool sip.

The Lettuce Bird
(for O.W.)

A frilled head, proud in its foliage,
is folding in and on itself, over and over,
like a hundred paper-thin hands clasped in one lap;
one head in a bunch of root-necked bedded heads,
open in their gaggle to an April sky
and quickly coming to seed.

Her mother's mind kept the lettuce bird,
yellow sprite in those relic eyes and flutter in the tongue.
Outside the window that slants with old shack age,
the blur of finches stealing June sun
and snatching swelled black seeds tells her mother
that spring is done.

Yeh mother, Opal says, yer bird right in season.
Set ye up mother, I need ta warsh yer back. Yeh,
today's the day 48 year ago Daddy died. God took him
on an ol hot day lak today, poor man goin on he's cold.
And my, my, those dirt daubers sure come out wi'the
hot sun, spattin about. They work up in that attic
enough. Mother? Hear their roarin?

August is hotter- brilliant as the coals,
the orange jewels in the stove, burnt from oak; hotter
than the preacher's truck last time he took them to town
a year ago, when bicentennial celebrations and the county
fair thickened traffic. They watched the Ferris wheel
over the Dollar General Store turning like a bolted sunset.

Now her mother sings about Ezekial
seeing the wheel, *right in the middle of the air.*
She cools her mother with a picture-card fan from
a funeral home, and with cold rainwater drawn
from the dark heart of their ramshackled well
in which a neighbor's child once drowned.

The feather bed stinks with sweat and urine;
the odor between her mother's legs standing
like hackles on the mattress. She beats the smell out,
the flat of her hand crusty with damp baking soda,
her words harmonizing with the cackling of hens
under the house. Her mother asks, *Who's spilled kerosene?*

R'member mother, Opal says, it was War I.
They shipped that boy's casket back with militeery
orders ta keep it sealt. Yeh, sem virus. And when
the Carter family opened it anyways for the service,
well the whole town come down sick. No, we never caught it.
Eva the only town visitor we had then. After she left you
put yer felt mask on, sat us outside, burnt whole pound
a sulfur. Never saw the lak a dust, big yella clouds
in the winda, and Daddy said, Looks lak God's
pillar-cloud had settled in our house,
d'liverin us lak it did Moses.

Quilts are untrunked to smother November
drafts. Nerves pop with the kindling in the red
pot-belly. Grief goes fever. She soothes her mother's
moans in black moonless bed, their skins
touch smooth crackle like the rinds of cantaloupes
scrawled and veined; but she is not her mother's husband.

She is not comfort and sleeps with her back
to her mother's, praying, like the night she was saved
by God, who now hunched like a heavy-flowered stem
her spine, it boning through her night slip sharp as a knuckle,
but when she accepted God that night, she wanted to shout
and witness, and her testimony became a church stone.

Tonight, she fears, her prayers are devil-talk,
selfish and vain; asking God why was she always ugly;
wanting to hide in the corner of the house her father
was embalmed in, where the coffin was perched; and
taunting God- What did the doctors do with it? In a jar,
or buried, her cancered breast, rotted after two years?

It was her mother, still sharp then, and stout
as a kettle, who dressed the skimmed wound
with peroxide and gauze plumped into a small breast.
It is her mother now whose mind fails, whose
mouth talks mean all night, and who needs, only,
the scrawny but gospel strength of her daughter.

Now mother, Opal says, you break my heart.
You know you mean more ta me than any huzben
e'er could. You're talkin out yer head. Hush now,
keep the cover tight. Yeh, it's winter now and
you're fevered. Should I boil you sem mullen tea?
Hold on. What're ya wavin yer arms up fer? They
ain't nothin peckin in yer hair. Oh mother, please,
you ain't gonna die. Lie still. Don't carry on,
they ain't no birds got in the house.

Inspiration

They won't get out of the road, the buzzards
all hunkered over, unstitching gizzards.
My aunt and I in the car are silent,
her tongue is cancered out, she is silent.
The buzzards have the pious eyes of squabs
set in burnt old turkey skins, with black straw
for crudely feathered hides. Griefless around death,
they pick at the mud-fat gut of a dog.

When aunt could speak, she would tell me stories
of when she was young: "If buzzards circled
the house, we knew that predicted viz'tors
so mother cooked extra. And when buzzards
perched our tree, undid their wingspans so slow,
well, they was shakin' out the chill of storms
and thunder, and we shut all our winders.
Have you ever heard a buzzard? They blow

like crazy geese, *unholy*. Your uncle
he left me widowed at twenty, stranded
me desp'rate, grievin' so, that a neighbor
who sold root salves and teas told me, *Young girl*
dance like a buzzard in your untilled field
and you'll see your husband to say farewell.
Sin likes idiots, and under the moon
that night I flopped and squalled in a fitful charleston

til early morning...all that showed int'rest
was useless animals." But aunt is quiet
as we slowly roll past this iron circle
of hackled backs *immovable, royal,*
in veils of lime barely raised, like instances
or stories that turn against cloddish teeth
out of habit, despite a dead tongue. Sweet
inspiration is dumb as an animal's
rotteness, protected by strong birds.

5 Voices

(for those starved into dogs)

I didn't know the boats
my back sauteed in everybody's piss
and all that african jibbermoaning
in my ear, the skinny slave-man
next to me choking on his own vomit,
his ribs kicking against his skin
and failing to hold his black body decently
stout. What a sight. We're civilized
now, though it took getting past plantations
and into sharecrop shacks. We owe
the white man. I love him. He
took me into his house one day,
gave me a drink of water
from his own enamel kettle
and standing there in his white trousers
he told me Nigger, now you're
pretty smart, and a good-looker
too, built like something. You
might do, he said, in this world.
I love that man. He said I might
do.

JAPS

Dont Let The Sun Set On You Here
Keep Moving
THIS IS ROSE HILL

The war missqueezed America's
libertarian tit,
we became poison in the melting pot.
NO JAPS ALLOWED,
but I wasn't Japanese.
I spoke slang, I scolded
the old language, I prayed
to Mr. President, collected
pounds of tin for spitfires.

I dream of setting up house
in Rose Hill
next door to this man, pale saddle-skinned
attendant in a blue mechanic's suit.
We were driving through,
saw the sign but needed gas.
The man, Texaco proud, varnished
with the rich grime of buick engines,

wouldn't wait on us, suspecting,
 I gathered, our extra ration
 cards. I was proud when father
 served himself only three gallons,
 handed over the cash
 and his government "A" card.
 Save for the brave, I thought.
 I leaned out my window,
 13 then, and the man
 he said, Hey fella, and he
 showed his yellow teeth in a smile
 that I was unaccustomed to, this
 Chesterfield smile greased, tarred
 with sweated down brilcream.
 He got close, I thought he might kiss
 me, his eyes might inspect mine
 see I'm Joe like him. He smothered
 my face with his petroleum-annointed hands,
 his thick fingertips on my temples
 and the heels of his palms
 flush at my throat. Hey fella,
 YOUR brother killed MINE.
 And he pushed his open hands
 into my face and down
 pulling my skin, distorting
 me ugly my vision he soared
 into my bible-belt idol,
 his smile a midwest tongue his hands
 American and as he ruined my face
 between his fingers ringing it new
 with the slap of gas station aftershave,
 the black cologne from chevrolets
 squatted on their hydraulic pedestals,
 as he remade my expression,
 he said,
*This way fella, with your eyes
 pulled down, you almost look
 alright.*

I am lean, my silks
 cost fortunes: panties, slips
 corsets. I am *femme*
de creme. Georgette. "Honey,
 I can really do you," I say, "Let me
 do you, Vinnie." I feel
 like a queen of bone china
 among these bulls of the barroom,
 Vinnie and his friends, Sal,
 the crudest, all of them

scummed muscles in condom
 skin. But Vinnie, when I see
 his shirt just slightly open
 showing a sliver of his
 man-oh-manliness, cleaved
 and heaving broad
 as a street-stone riped smooth
 by the heels of whores like me,
well, I tell you,
 I'd wear out the knees of my finest
 new seamed hosiery just to worship
 a small taste. Right now
 I'm risking this old neighborhood,
 giving up an evening
 at Stewart's, our Manhattan
 cocktail lounge, a fag's
 grand central, all the girls
 made over with Coty
 "Air spun" corn silk, all crimsonly
 lappelled, crepely waisted, toilet
 watered with Yardley fragrances,
 and, for a man, I am in Brooklyn.
 "Let's go for a walk, Vincent,
 the pills are up, I can see
straight, Vinnie,
 as straight as a queen can see."

Brooklyn is strict
 and Vinnie swallows it whole
 every night. I know
 he can never love a faggot
 without rejecting him in the street.
 I take the damn mockery, Sal
 mulling the switchblade over my thigh;
 I'll make you into a woman, he says,
 and Vinnie laughs, I laugh,
 game for the hyena emotion--
 Sal, You couldn't make a woman
 if she came with a tire pump
 --until my woman's balls feel the point
 through silk and corduroy, I shriek
 for Vinnie and run outside, *Vinnie!*
 But he is not a queer damsel's hero,
 he is slapping the backs
 of these hecklers rooting each other
 into a straight and solid nest
 around me, the switchblade pitched
 from side to side off the cement
 under my feet and I am dancing against
 getting cut. *Vinnie!* I must look awful,
 jerking like a grotesque little bobbin,

threaded to these animals, my humiliation
dilated under the streetlights, I am
gracelessly brought down.

Vinnie! He pulls out the blade
from the trembling pulse in my leg.
I lean on him, the only bit of hero,
of nurse with tourniquet, he can ever give me
here on the street, or anywhere;
his heart is all cobble and fist,
all liquor-blooded.
He makes me give him money for a taxi,
and Sal the Joke goes with us.
They take the taxi back to their neighborhood.
I wave, adieu, from my steps
like a limp warred-upon queen,
worthless and kingless,
Georgette.

The night we were uncattled
from the train car, divided
by the Nazis, scrubbed down
with the last lye soap, the last
wash-water we would see for months,
that night, still a buxom Jewess,
before my breasts gnarled into black potatoes,
lice nesting in my rickety cleavage,
before my elbow and knee bones
became as obvious as Nazi fists
swelling in my limbs, clenching thinnest
my blood and muscle, and before
my pelvis reduced to a drum
wearily thumping hunger,
hunger (Now I think
they fed us their mud-water soup
seasoned with alum as an experiment
to see how ridiculously shriveled
we would become)

but before
all this, when I was new and cleaner,
a guard raped me
and promised I would live.
He became my SS Angel
those years in the camp.
Even when he beat the others
I remembered
"You'll live," he said, "Obey
and work hard."

I was grateful that my guard,
so sturdy and woolen, spat
his precious Aryan seed
into what Nazis called
the cunt of a half-caste.
I felt protected, his semen
formed a holy stone
in the middle of my body,
an unfeatured crystal baby
that warded away brutality.

When he was fastening his belt,
I asked him what
reddened the sky over
the north buildings of the camp,
why the stoked volcano haze, he said "Oh,
they are baking many loaves of bread
for all of you to eat after you've worked."
I didn't ask him why
certain chimneys stank with smoke
and others were clean; I believed
they baked bread day and night, even
when I never saw it or tasted
it; even when I heard what
was gassed and burned there, I held faith
in my guard who never cussed me
unless other guards were around.

And upon our liberation
from the camps, when the allies
gathered the living and buried
the unburied dead, bodies
weaved like garbled cursive
across oceanic pits,
I am now angered
that the sight of a naked young woman
center in one communal grave, her legs
spread-eagled, her arms out
wide over the other Jew skeletons,
her mouth clenching a rotted tongue
dry as dirt, angered
that this evoked
pity, that for her I regretted
her not being raped,
that I secretly hallowed
a Nazi guard
for molesting me into freedom.

I am *not* worth an even nickel's sympathy.

because my mother's raw stomach
is the hub of this house
and I savor my first seconds against its hard fat;
and my brother's long arms
are tattooed with skulls
that fit perfectly against the palms of my hands;
because there are these moments I don't fight.

when in my mother's room,
I roll with the stucco flowers
from corner to corner,
I am limber like the scrollwork
across plastic dresser drawers,
and on the strop-width of the leather belt
she fastens around my naked waist,
there are notches a man cut,
probably my father,
I think about those undated tallies,
I squander with light across the ceiling.

in our room, later, my brother
gets on top of me, every night
I worry he won't pull it out in time,
but the any-man's weight on me, I like, the veins
his muscles press into my church-mouse breasts,
and then I just want it over, when I
hear the sagging siren of his breath, when
he excuses himself with guilty lines
stolen from my own abused diary
and turned onto me easy as this:
Great resistings, he says, are feeble,
root-rotted by the smallest needs.
I believe him.

Four

Angels

1.

Chickenchickenchickenchick- Pop!

It's a dance, do the wringing, do the
wild nerves around the barnyard,
your orange feet jumping up and getting down
around your own wrenched off fist-combed head
as if it were a sombrero.

Some terrible angel- madly scratching calligraphy
in the hen-pen dirt
and dotting all the fine i's with blood
from a fountaining neck.

2.

Boils work pot bottom up;

In a quick rash on the skin of the water
they break into steam the odor of pig's breath,
they carry on their shoulder's in victory
the hog's head split in two and cleaned,
they dance the lean and fat loose from the skull
and kiss the ears and snout tender.

Jaws turn over a bowl,

grinding out the fat and chopped suet
into an obscure clay sowed with tart apples,
sweet currants, raisins, oranges and lemons,
with sugar and nutmeg and mace, then poured
into a deep pie-shell as mincemeat and baked
until every taste of blood and life is sweet.

Knives slice dessert, meat pie.

Holy Endurance

Fennel seeds in stone-hard bread, I feel
the knife grunt on their sternness

slicing through, the seeds refusing
to give over to dissection of body
or taste. My kitchen table is small

without its leaf, small enough for one,
a single boiled egg and a saucer of heavy
toast too dense with wheat. I

try to remember what book in the Bible
praises the mustard seed, another
stubborn wallop of a spice. Nobody

gives in. Anymore I admire
the small tasteless bits of backbone
trapped in fried salmon cakes. They

have no pretense, no holy endurance,
are crushable by the weakest tongue. Days
and days I wish for fainting spells,

to double over my cart in the store,
and fall back across the piled onions
with no thought of what the boys might think

of me, stocking their shelves with canned soups
or pickled pigs' ears or common peas. I
want at crowded auctions to give myself

to the cancerous heat of summer, let my skin
burn, and sweat take me over without
reaching to fix my hair, without suspecting

every old man of leering at my pigeon chest
to decide my gender. I sit here
at my breakfast, at home with isolation,

with my flaws, dreading to rise
and glare like the sun in the company
of bank ladies I work with and our bosses

and the people withdrawing,
depositing, I must seem as composed
as a powdered nose. No anxiety must show.

Nothing to ever invite the derogatory. I lock
my door, leaving, fighting all my strength
for one luxurious moment of collapse.

Find me on my doorstep, a heap
of queerness finally broken open.

King Coon's Day

Day to cook a 'coon, the whole thing
tail, eyeballs and all
The hair will burn dry and coarse
while the eyes cook slack and seamless
and that born two-fifths a jackal stench
will stew through strong- that pronounced odor
you wouldn't sit by or share a bowl with
or kiss.

Day to cook a 'coon, you say stuff the rump
with basil and mint
and gag its mouth with bay leaves
Shackle it on a platter with onion birthstones,
preparing it for your Sunday table
between the hollandaise sauce
and the candied yams.

Time to carve the 'coon; an unconscious slice
down its back
with a christ-kissed blade. Pin the skin back
clear of the bone to see the blood inside
boiled the color of kidney bean water, to smell the steam
from swelled and deflated bladders. Now cut a good fat piece
for each porcelain-skinned plate around the table,
turning your nose and eyes away until each
hirsute slab is smothered with steak gravy
and the raccoon's hollow staring head is removed
to the kitchen for your dog to hold in its callous mouth
like a pill.

Five

Moonsliver, baby

baby, your thing ain't nothing
but a chinese pea pod getting all steamed
better calm it down, baby,
before you're busting both little buttons

you ain't nothing to be thinking
you're getting some gumption in my pockets
don't think to be climbing on me
without a kiss the size of salt on sting

I don't care how swelled your heart is,
how fast you firecrack or damn you dazzle,
I can't allow myself to be taken under by love
and, baby, your thing ain't nothing.

Husband Hunting

I'm going to get my rolling pin
and go Krogering for a man,
a nice meaty one with broad rump cheeks
and fine-haired armpits thick as silky hops
that I can press my face against on hot days
and get drunk.

I mean it, I am finding a man
and I don't want no kidney-pickled
moon-eyed thing wilty as a drought weed,
nor a fancy bottled man smelling like a casket
parfum (though when he gets old I might
can him in a Mason jar full of white lard
and boil him in a pressure cooker
to keep him looking good. I will kiss him
through the green-blue glass, which won't be too bad
because I'll have another fresher man in my bed
by then) No,

See that man over there
in that silver oldsmobile?
I've set my mind on *him* today- a sweet young
preacher- Well, this year I've had a dog catcher,
my landlord, a bank president, and buried all
three, so now I need the word of God!

It's true, I'm a dangerous sinner in bed
but men know I'm the difference between tavern
and townhouse so they climb on in. I
rub up against them, the pores in my loving arms
opening wide and sharp as the holes in a grater,
while the solid of my torso becomes a skin-lined
mortar. I romp and stroke them into a powder,
poor men, rubbed sage seasoning the boiling stew
in my heart with nothing but the soprano
whisper of a moan as they slowly dissolve. I
taste them for weeks on the back of my throat.

Now here comes a policeman
walking like he made the ground.
He could lock me in a jailcell if he knew I bragged
about a collection of men's bones under my mattress,
but I'd still get him. Not that I'm no Bermuda
Triangle, *intending* to steal down the ships
of my men, and anyway,
he might be the one I'm looking for, the one
who'll outlast me, the one who
won't get old and worn.

1.

"The Evenings and the Nights of Cole Porter Years After the Accident" was inspired by the Cole Porter documentary "You're the Top" and by stories from Gerald Clarke's Capote, A Biography.

2.

In "5 Voices," part one was inspired by the painting "Slave Deck of the Albanoz" by Godfrey Meynell (1846). Part two was inspired by a photograph of two Japanese men and three white children in front of a sign that reads "Japs Dont Let The Sun Set On You Here..." (photographer unknown). Part Three is based on Hubert Selby, Jr.'s book Last Exit to Brooklyn and the film of the same name based on the book. Facts for part four were obtained from the book The Yellow Star.

3.

"O Heavy Horse" was inspired by the lines from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, "O happy horse, / To bear the weight of Antony!"

4.

"Angels" contains two completed poems from a series in progress. This series will hopefully be subtle but strong in its advocacy of animal rights.