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Author

Wiget, Andrew

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about how you change when you are in love. . . . When you say, 'I love you,' you are saying, 'I transform you.' But since you alone can transform no one, what you are really saying is, 'I transform myself and my vision' " (p. 156). There is perhaps a superficial connection between Agnes transforming herself into animals and the lover's transformation of herself, but, on the other hand, the context of love is totally absent from Agnes' animal transformations, making the teaching strained and arbitrary.

For the reader who persists, there are in *Flight of the Seventh Moon* occasions of insight, but only those readers who come to it predisposed to the paranormal are likely to feel that the rewards justify the effort. To such readers, the further question of the authenticity of the experiences, rituals, and teachings will scarcely matter, just as it does not really matter to the devotees of Storm and Castenada.

Dennis R. Hoilman
Ball State University

Star Quilt. By Roberta Hill Whiteman. Minneapolis: Holy Cow! Press, 1984. 81 pp. \$6.95 Paper.

Like most, I imagine, I first encountered the poetry of (then) Roberta Hill in the pages of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*. It was evident then that there was great power in Roberta Hill's vision; a supple, muscular grace sinewed her lines. The early judgment was that this was a poet to be reckoned with. That was ten years ago. A few poems appeared in the intervening years, but little else. When the Modern Language Association met in Los Angeles a few years back, I attended a reading of prominent women poets where I was introduced to Roberta Hill Whiteman. Like me she had come to hear these poets read, but after the reading it was clear, to me at least, that her seven- and eight-year-old poems were the equal of those being so prominently displayed that night, and that Roberta Hill Whiteman's achievement would have been just as publicly recognized except for the fact that she had not published a book. When in the course of conversation that evening she mentioned that her book had been accepted for publication and was coming out in a year or so, anticipation be-

gan building immediately, for everyone's expectations were very high. After some delay, it has finally arrived, and I'm here to say you will not be disappointed by *Star Quilt*.

The volume is organized around four sections, introduced by a frontispiece poem and a theme/title poem. The frontispiece poem, with the repetitive rhythms of prayer, invokes the healing power of the Earth and Sky to dedicate the volume and establishes a theme central to the poetry: "Let us survive/ Inside a sacred space." The title poem is charged with all sorts of oxymoronic juxtapositions: "These are notes to lightning in my bedroom," the poet writes, "A star forged from linen thread and patches"(1). By linking "lightning" and "bedroom," "forge" and "linen," she domesticates the power of Sky, becoming intimate with its strength and energy. This domesticated power she vulcanizes and transforms through the image of the quilt and words ("these are *notes* to lightning") so that these forms of art become vitalizing, healing creations empowered to reconcile self and other, past and present, bitter memory and sweet expectations:

**Star quilt, sewn from dawn light by fingers
of flint, take away those touches
meant for noisier skins,**

**anoint us with grass and twilight air,
so we may embrace, two bitter roots
pushing back into the dust.**

From this point the poet sets out on a journey of reconciliation in four stages.

The first section, "Sometimes in Other Autumns," is about loss and about searching for a way out of its burden that does not deny its truth. "Direction" invokes the four quarters and touches each only to conclude in a waiting. "Twenty years I've lived on ruin," she writes in the next poem ("Lines for Marking Time,"7), her house haunted by the memories of parents. The loss of these two, it seems to me, is what brings her writing into focus as a vocation, a felt need, for she is ever writing lines, as she does here, linking the two: "In your silence, I grew visions for myself." The brutal simple grace of these poems of loss—especially in lines like, "Answers/ never come late."—frequently remind one of James Welch's poetry. To my mind the best of the poems in this first section is "Underground Water," which has

a powerful coherence and a familiar focus: a child wakes in the night and leaves his bed to go to the parents' bed where he sleeps in peace. (Though "he" is mentioned, the poem may have an autobiographical origin for Whiteman uses the same scene and images in "Mother" [72]). As the child returns to his parents' side, he is in fact taking "the long way home." (9) to the "underground water . . . warmth of sea plums . . . where] a birthmark of foam encircles his neck." Preoccupied with the present, his mother, however, cannot "hear

**the lilies rise, the weeds spin in the shallows
or water lap the half-awakened stones.
She hasn't words enough to lock his days.**

Whiteman sustains a powerfully coherent imagery and intimate elegaic tone as the mother in her present slips away from him, yielding to these primal needs to the ending, when "Softer than the eye closing in death/ a curled leaf falls from his forehead/ and is lost in the grass." (10) Whether the loss of that childself, or the loss of parents, or the loss of heritage she does not flinch from embracing them, so that the knowledge of what was lost is a found strength. This bringing home of pain and loss to oneself is imaged eloquently in "In the Longhouse, Oneida Museum," where, after admitting, "House of five fires, you never raised me," she concludes: "House of five fires, they take you for a tomb,/ but I know better. When desolation comes,/ I'll hide your ridgpole in my spine." (16)

In the second section, "Fighting Back the Cold with Tongues," the poet finds strength to deal with loss by joining her voice with those of others who inhabit "A Nation Wrapped in Stone." (25) The potency of her images is a measure of the degree to which she has realized this pain and sorrow. At one moment, "We are left with grief, sinking boneward,/ and time to watch rain soak the tree." (25) Again: "I know of a lodestone in the prairie,/ where children are unconsolated by wishes,/ where tears salt bread." (30) Or awaiting in deepest winter the return of a lover, she hopes "we'd sputter like oil,/ match after match, warm in the making." (35) The section concludes with a poem for her father who taught her how to both love and grieve by his response to the death of her mother.

The third section is entitled, "Love, the Final Healer," and poem for poem is perhaps the strongest of the four. The poems

are linked by the theme of recognition. In seeing each other's life, we are brought to a healing awareness of our own, and in this way the others with whom she had been moved to share grief now begin to call her out of it. Coyotes cross her path on the highway, fix her in their gaze; seals draw her attention at the beach. Everywhere Life beckons, though, as she says in "The Recognition," perhaps "we learn too late the useless way light leaves/ footprints of its own," a beautiful lyricism recouped in "An Old Man's Round For the Geese." But "Scraps Worthy of the Wind" dominates the heart of this section. Like the poem preceding it, "Falling Moon," it is dominated by the image of ruins and by the poet's need to move beyond them. Both poems also simulate this movement by effecting a kind of closure through reversal of the initial image and then "breaking out" of that sense of finished form by continuing on with additional lines. I'm not sure how successful this is (the closure is more effective than that which follows), but there's Will and Wisdom enough here for anyone:

**I've walked those ruins and arranged
the ways I've died there
on scraps of paper worthy enough
for the wind. I've worked hard,
treading this lake that is my life,**

* * * * *

**. . . We cannot hate
ourselves enough to justify
that world. I wore blame
until it became a birthmark,
but no more.
Death comes soon enough. (51)**

Such clarity of vision, such courage, such reverence for the final unapproachable mystery of being-in-the-world, she longs to pass on to her son in the final poem of the section: "I can only whisper what I'm learning still,/ what the trees completely understand." (59)

In the book's final section, "Music for Two Guitars," the poet proclaims a "blindness/ Born of delayed elation," as she celebrates the healing brought by love. But if satisfaction will empty life of its urgency, then she will have none of it, arguing

that "perhaps we shouldn't plan to arrive at the end/ of love, but should move inside its mystery." (64) It is that acute balance between ecstasy and mystery she wants to inhabit. "In "Reaching New Town, N.D.," she tries to understand her relationship to her lover as "wind over water" and "wind through cottonwoods," but

**We were neither wave nor wood,
but wind finding wind in North Dakota.**

* * * *

**until funnels formed in the sky over Stanley.
Wind over wind. I dreamed of tornadoes
and welcomed their voices,
my love, oh, my love. (65)**

In another poem, she takes the famous excursion boat, *Maid of the Mist*, beneath Niagara Falls, where she identifies her spirit with the birds that soar within the cove of the cataract: "A thousand gulls charmed that frantic air." (71) The storm image recurs in a poem dedicated to Oscar Howe, where she sees herself in an image from one of his paintings "balanced . . . within a cyclone."

A tremendous energy animates these poems, but it is always made to dance, choreographed by well-modulated rhythms and a good ear for the emotional echoes of language. Sometimes her images are too private, perhaps, but most often they stun us with their clarity and force. Over all prevails a sense of exquisite balance, like that of gull in a cliff's updraft, a hawk hung on the roaring wind, the poise, the power.

Andrew Wiget
New Mexico State University

The Rattlesnake Band & Other Poems. By Robert J. Conley. Indian University Press: Muskogee, Oklahoma, 1984. 124 pp. \$5.00 Paper.

In exchange for this review, I have received an interesting perhaps even unique book, but one that I am afraid I cannot whole-heartedly recommend.