

These are quibbles when confronted with an editorial work as ambitious, accomplished, and ardent as *Burning City*. Yet an anthology that articulates its work in so many diverse metaphors—one part museum “gallery,” one part tourist guide (“multi-sensory Baedeker”), one part pantascopic “flyover,” and one part fetish—necessarily reminds us that the poems could be shuffled according to several protocols. Rasula and Conley’s editorial ingenuity has the side effect of sidelining national literary histories, linguistic diversities, genres, and figural and formal aspects of verse that still exert drag on poetry as it sings of a singular, radiant metropolis. This is not an argument with *Burning City* so much as it is with the print anthology as such. Imagine its online successor: high resolution, hyperlinked, annotated, and tagged, layering dozens of organizational possibilities without deferring this collection’s real refreshment of the anthologist’s creative, curatorial, and evaluative functions. We already need a *Burning City 2.0*, as good as this one is.

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Jay Wright, *Disorientations: Groundings*. Chicago: Flood Editions, 2013. 98pp. \$15.95

Readers of Jay Wright’s poetry know him as a relentlessly allusive and idiosyncratic mythmaker who is always playing more games than one. Wright’s study of West African cosmology and ritual practice fully emerged in his second book, *Soothsayers and Omens* (1976). But from the start his poetry laid claim to multiple identities and traditions, and has continued to do so with a sort of exponential simultaneity. One never knows where a new volume is likely to take him, or us.

In Wright’s thirteenth book of poems, *Disorientations: Groundings*, the range of associations (or should I say “associates”) has never been more varied. Divided into four sections named after the Dogon tribe’s graduated system of religious initiation, Wright’s sequence features recurring appearances by Argentinean poet Robert Molinari (“Molinari, / with his caked fingernails and an eye / for Delphic hemlock”), quantum physicist Niels Bohr, and the notorious cynic, Diogenes, who spreads his fishnets “Here in Ajijic,” Mexico. (Wright blows the unities of time and place to high heaven.) Other figures include “Don Alfonso,” “Don Lupe,” “Stratis Thalassinus” (the Greek poet, George Seferis), “the Cusan” (Nicholas of Cusa?), “Baca” (“Biblical Baca”), (Luis) “Cernuda,” (José) “Gorostiza,” “the Intrusive, Insubstantial, Hypertensive, and Insulting Ronald Firkbank,” “Thomas the Pythagorean Scot,” “Langston” (Hughes), “Bruno,” “the Carolingian,” “Aden,” “the Parisian,”

impossibility of a happy night at the El Farol Bar in Santa Fe, if everyone shares precisely the same strategy for happiness (the bar will be far too crowded, or empty). Strictly speaking, not every sorrow can be ameliorated by tacos and beer (alas), given the limitations of time and space.

From Wright's angle of vision, there really is no voice that is not also other voices, no life that is not many lives, no name that is not a compact of histories and geographies. In "Somewhere between here and Belen," "Belen" is a city in New Mexico, but also Spanish for "Bethlehem." "My friend, Nick Markulis," Wright tells us, "claims / he loves the river's color there, and will bathe / his toes in the [Rio Grande], and will go on and on / about a dry river in Athens that measures its life / in olive groves" ("and, of course, you know of Arethusa's / fountain in Syracuse"). "Markulis" becomes "Markopoulos": "Markopoulos, Markulis, / fugitive names, fugitive lives docking in Halifax." Almost any word may prove a trap door, leading us down through corridors of many kinds of histories. So, too, Wright's voice opens out into other voices, which are no less his because they share other names. "One cannot remain composed," Wright charmingly observes, "when hunters and cultic figures press their claims / upon a sainted afternoon."

The cover art of *Disorientations: Groundings* is a detail from Caravaggio's *St. Jerome Writing*, of an arm extended over volumes of great open books, with a pen in hand (and a skull on the desk). It is a fitting emblem for the palimpsest of Wright's poetry, informed and patterned as it is by his insatiable adventure as a reader, his communion with the dead. But it is also a fitting emblem for the predicament of Wright's reader, or at least this reader. I am always annotating my volumes of Wright's poetry, over a table of open books: a curriculum based on the clues he drops. But it should be said that Wright's work doesn't require footnotes, any more than Eliot's or Dante's, to convey the force of its invention. Dante ("the Florentine") had Virgil to guide him through his *Commedia*. Wright has almost as many Virgilian guides as Dante has sinners, and their presence is always a blessing, whether we can trace their origins or not. In the opening pages of *Disorientations: Groundings*, one of them offers what may serve as advice (and a promise) to any reader turning for the first time to Wright's work:

Leave the gate open;
someone will appear in white garments
to measure the freestanding empiricism
of salvation,
and the sweetest motets will prepare
a labyrinth of apprehension.

Neil Arditi