

EDITED BY
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visiting wallace

Poems

Inspired by

the Life and

Work of

Wallace Stevens

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Descriptions without Places

Many poets who are devoted readers of Wallace Stevens are charmed and even seduced by the quiet house on a weekday evening, the reader in his chair, the sullen man sitting at the end of his bed, the ordinariness that constituted Stevens's quiet suburban life — often, in the poems, the implied scene of composition that serves as the starting point for wild flights of imagination. Dennis Barone, one of our editors, captures this sense in the very words and phrases he chooses for “An Ordinary Evening”: *empty, quiet, large, slightly, nothing remains, dried out, sits, awaits, dreams, stretches forth, distant*. Most of the poems assembled here comprehend this — what is it, really? — disaffected intensity.

The disaffection is a marvel, since it prevents a definitive legacy. The man in the room in the house is sufficiently vague in his love of mundane things to enable poetic identities across the landscape, inside and out. Sitting quietly in his chair, he and we are everywhere and nowhere. His style functions likewise.

Indeed, seventy-six poems give us seventy-six distinct Stevenses to follow and succeed. Is there another modern poet who means this many distinct things to contemporary verse? Meet all these aesthetic selves in the words of those whom he — *they* — influenced. Here is the man hard to love, beloved nonetheless (in Robert Bly's tribute); the poet so rhetorically overwhelming that one cannot help but fall into his demotic yet abstract vocabulary (“mak[ing] all acquiesce to one's preeminent premise,” says Creeley); the modernist who's gotten so completely under later poets' skins that satire (as in Mark DeFoe's “Thirteen Ways of Eradicating Blackbirds”) seems the only poetic recourse; the lonely lover joining the most intense rendezvous of paramours who are exactly as strange to themselves as to society (in John Ashbery's truly great poem, “Some

Trees"); the personage to be awed (as in Richard Eberhart's memory of drinking pitchers of martinis with the great poet at the Canoe Club); the businessman-poet who made money but also contemplated his rich idiomatic life (in Dana Gioia's formal riff); the Edward Hopperesque purveyor of hard flat surfaces (per Tony Quagliano); the theorist of nothingness who makes us think plentifully (per Jerome Sala); the man with the tropical imagination (Lisa M. Steinman); the language philosopher (in Michael Palmer's brilliant lyric on "linear inquiry"); the tragic composer (David St. John); the man made of words (R. S. Thomas); the landscape colorist (Charles Tomlinson), the urbanist (Lewis Turco); the citizen who lives nowhere (William Carlos Williams); and, back in the house, the room-to-room wanderer (Susan Howe).

The implicit generosity of what Barone and Finnegan have done in this volume will widen and extend our approaches to a poet whose effect on us is never as clear as that of Whitman, Pound, Dickinson, or Ginsberg. In *Visiting Emily*, disconcerting and exciting as it is, we nonetheless know what possibility we're dwelling in, and we land on the room's floor with both feet. In *Visiting Wallace*, we stay (in Howe's words) "on tiptoe" and "do not infringe."