Classic Poetry Series

Forrest Hamer

- poems -

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Forrest Hamer (1956 -)

Forrest Hamer is an American poet, psychologist, and psychoanalyst. He is the author of three poetry collections, most recently Rift (Four Way Books, 2007). His first collection, Call & Response, (Alice James Books) won the Beatrice Hawley Award, and his second, Middle Ear (Roundhouse Press), received the Northern California Book Award. He has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the California Arts Council, and he has taught at the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshops.

His poetry has been anthologized in Poet's Choice: Poems for Everyday Life, The Geography of Home: California's Poetry of Place, The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South, Blues Poems, Word of Mouth: An Anthology of Gay American Poetry, and three editions of The Best American Poetry; and has appeared in many magazines and literary journals including The American Poetry Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Kenyon Review, Callaloo, Ploughshares, Shenandoah, TriQuarterly, and ZYZZYVA. He was educated at Yale University and the University of California - Berkeley. He lives in Oakland, California.

Eserleri:

Rift. Four Way Books. 2007. ISBN 9781884800757.
Middle Ear (Roundhouse, 2000)
Call and Response (Alice James Books, 1995)

A dull sound, varying now and again

And then we began eating corn starch,
chalk chewed wet into sirup. We pilfered
Argo boxes stored away to stiffen
my white dress shirt, and my cousin
and I played or watched TV, no longer annoyed
by the din of never cooling afternoons.

On the way home from church one fifth Sunday,
shirt outside my pants, my tie clipped on
its wrinkling collar, I found a new small can of snuff,
packed a chunk inside my cheek, and tripped
from the musky sting making my head ache,
giving me shivers knowing my aunt hid cigarettes

in the drawer under her slips,
that drawer the middle one on the left.

Forrest Hamer

A Poem also About Duplicity

It would be unfortunate if the idea of multiple selves
obscured the fact the self is still
responsible for the terror it makes in the mind.

It would be a mistake if the multiple meanings
of words like torture disguised the fact
we are torturers, with lessened concern about it.

It would be tragic if the loss of multiple relationships
to the unconscious
obviated the possibility
of minding a more responsible life.
I say this as someone who minds
what insanity means, not what we are coming to think.

Imagination means so much;
so much depends on what's under.

Forrest Hamer

A Poem also About the Unconscious

To make it back home across town,
we had to learn to walk
only through black neighborhoods.
Think about this as the map
of a mind

laying out spaces
that are familiar and safe
as well as the places where, if it is dark, someone in the distance
crosses to the other side of the street,
just in case.

Forrest Hamer

Charlene-n-Booker 4ever

And the old men, supervising grown grandsons, nephews,
any man a boy given this chance of making
a new sidewalk outside the apartment building where
some of them live, three old men and their wives,
the aging unmarrying children, and the child
who is a cousin, whose mother has sent her here
because she doesn't know what to do with her,
she's out of control, she wants to be a gangsta, and
the old folks talk to her as if she minds them
and already has that respect for their years her mother
finally grew into. The girl who does not look
like them eats and eats and sleeps late, sneaks away
when they are busy, and tonight will write herself
all over the sidewalk while it is still wet but
the old have gone inside, and the grown gone home,
and her mother who is somewhere overseas thinks of
writing her that long long letter, but decides not to.

Forrest Hamer

Grace

This air is flooded with her. I am a boy again, and my mother and I lie on wet grass, laughing. She startles, turns to marigolds at my side, saying beautiful, and I can see the red there is in them.

When she would fall into her thoughts, we'd look for what distracted her from us.

My mother's gone again as suddenly as ever and, seven months after the funeral, I go dancing. I am becoming grateful. Breathing, thinking, marigolds.

Forrest Hamer

Initiation

After I stumbled through the gauntlet, after they had hit me
As hard as they could,
Some there only because there was someone else
To be brought in, I joined them
In greeting the new ones, the frightened and longing ones,
And I punched as hard and as much as I could, something
Filling in me I would tell you was a thrill
Only because I had no better word for it.
There was another word for it: violence
Made my mother impatient with me, she would call me evil,
And I knew what she was trying to talk to me about—
How much I hated,
How much I wanted and how greedy wanting made me.
What I wanted most were better words.

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Lesson

It was 1963 or 4, summer,
and my father was driving our family
from Ft. Hood to North Carolina in our 56 Buick.
We'd been hearing about Klan attacks, and we knew

Mississippi to be more dangerous than usual.
Dark lay hanging from the trees the way moss did,
and when it moaned light against the windows
that night, my father pulled off the road to sleep.

Noises
that usually woke me from rest afraid of monsters
kept my father awake that night, too,
and I lay in the quiet noticing him listen, learning
that he might not be able always to protect us

from everything and the creatures besides;
perhaps not even from the fury suddenly loud
through my body about his trip from Texas
to settle us home before he would go away

to a place no place in the world
he named Viet Nam. A boy needs a father
with him, I kept thinking, fixed against noise
from the dark.

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