Selected poems

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Selected Poems

Ann Fisher Wirth ¹

¹ Ann Fisher-Wirth’s fourth book of poems is Dream Cabinet (Wings Press 2012). Her other books of poems are Carta Marina, Blue Window, and Five Terraces. With Laura-Gray Street, she coedited the groundbreaking EcoPoetry Anthology (Trinity UP 2013, 2014). She has been awarded residencies at The Mesa Refuge; Djerassi Resident Artists Program; Hedgebrook; and CAMAC/Centre d’Art, Marnay, France. Her current project is a collaborative poetry/photography manuscript called Mississippi with the acclaimed photographer Maude Schuyler Clay, which Wings Press will publish in 2017. Photographs and letterpress poems from this project are presently on exhibit throughout Mississippi. Ann is a Fellow 2015-2018 of the Black Earth Institute, the recipient of two senior Fulbrights (Switzerland, Sweden), and past president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. She teaches and directs the Environmental Studies program at the University of Mississippi, and she teaches yoga at Southern Star in Oxford.
Report from the Neighborhood

Four Carolina wren eggs, big
as the tip of my thumb,
each with a specked dusting

that looks like a tonsure of dirt
or cocoa, abandoned in the nest
outside my kitchen. Delilah,

the pretty little calico next door—
where students party, playing Frisbee
or lounging around the porch keg

in baggy tees and gym shorts—
Delilah slinks through our yard,
flattening her belly to the grass

and her ears to her head. She wants
the robins and cardinals so bad
and maybe she got the mama

but mostly the birds just
flitter up into the pecan trees
or privet hedges and keep warbling.

I have laid the four never-to-be-born
delicate eggs carefully in a tiny
Chinese bowl, white as snow inside,

patterned outside with turquoise
phoenixes and golden lotuses,
and I stroke them with one fingertip.

It’s ninety-six degrees today.
Hydrangea leaves hang limp.
A summer thunderstorm’s rising.
Broccoli

When she said the Korean orphans would love to have my broccoli, I suggested we send it to them next time we mailed

a Christmas box to daddy—slippers, cheese, mints, pictures of me and my little sister, boxed tight with twine and sealing wax to his APO in Seoul. I hoped those children with bowl-cut bangs and magenta sweaters would enjoy what to me were smelly trees—

but got sent to bed for my “sass,” couldn’t play Kick the Can in the twilight street till bedtime for a week. My broccoli joined other dishes

in the white, round-topped, Westinghouse fridge: leftover bullet peas, half a tuna sandwich, stewed tomatoes, congealed drippings our mother never used for gravy but hung on to nonetheless as “the good essence of the meat.” When she was a child, she had to clean her plate because of the starving Armenians; when my kids were little, I refused to tell them they had to eat for Ethiopia. Always

abundance, always hunger—just last week, I saw a one-armed man dumpster diving in Thessaloniki, and feral cats lined up around our table at the seaside restaurant, waiting patiently, silently, for bits of falafel or squid. My mother lived through the Depression, couldn’t stop saving leftovers even though, in the prosperous Pennsylvania 50’s, she never used them.

And I? I serve leftover pasta five nights in a row, make crazy combinations from dabs of rice, that lone half-breast of chicken, the final withered carrot, three mushrooms, scrambled eggs. I want to be
better than I am—not to add so much

to the world’s waste. And I want, at last, to be buried un-embalmed, un-leftover, in Mississippi forest land beneath an oak or dogwood tree.
We walked away from the village of Corsaglia along a trail that led through lush,

Species loss

nearly impenetrable oak, hazelnut, and chestnut woods, past ancient stone houses

ocean acidification

and shepherds’ huts, beside a rushing stream. When we began to walk it was softly

ocean “dead zones”

raining. The rain soon stopped, but the mist and cool soft air remained. Everywhere

global freshwater crisis

wildflowers—buttercups, daisies, scabiosa with its purple tufts, Johnny jump-ups,

deforestation

button ferns, wild geraniums, wild strawberries. Once, when the river

consequent soil erosion

curved away, a meadow opened up to our left, and it was so richly flowering

colony collapse disorder

that I could only think of the millefleurs foregrounds of medieval paintings,

fertilizers and herbicides, chemically toxic soil

the thousand small flowers springing up around the Christ child
Mouna
(First published in Heron Tree 2016)

Sanskrit: silence

Why do you think you must have something to say?

The clouds do not speak. The water spreads
nearly to infinity

with its ragged hem of dark trees, and those grasses
there in the corner of your vision, the wind

moves them or does not move them,
they stretch forward into the light.

Lake, trees, sky—
look, everything is breathing.

You could put your fingers through these clouds.
Piled high above the lake, they’re wet air, silence.