

CAROL HAMILTON

Stages

"...by August the birds are practically silent."

Lisa Mueller

They are busy grubbing out
grubs, occupied and exhausted,
not sure if they are happy
more obsessed
with safety than ever,
like oxygen-starved climbers
nearing the summit.

Until this year, though,
my lovelorn mockingbird
clattered through his store
of stolen songs, desperate,
both days and nights, seeking
a discerning female
talent scout.

This year the songs stopped
and the waterfall green
of the overgrown bush
beneath his microphone
no longer sings in white blossoms
but speaks in just
chitters and chatters.

They are all busy now,
no call for dangerous
longings.

Hauntings

A big family,
little ones all jabbering
in Spanish, but the suffering one
sprawled on the floor, legs
flopped open, eyes staring at me,
pools of fear and pain,
the very eyes of my granddaughter,
the deadly serious one when small,
full of the deep wisdom
that out there somewhere
trouble is waiting. The child
never took her eyes from mine
through all the talk, all the exam,
and as we left, she dared a small,
hopeful smile at me. I knew
the treatment to follow, one
she had often endured,
and even now, I regret
that trust I somehow inspired.
Two weeks later she was back,
the same. I was glad
not to be assigned her room,
though I would have loved
to see those too old eyes
turn young.

Hates and Loves and My Old Foggy Syndrome

Some of my generation and some of 20 more years
(is it possible? I rather hope not!) give me sneers
and looks as if they are cleaning off shoes of smears
of dog poop with a stick when they hear

my delight in some poem completely freed
of heroic couplets or of loved e-mails I need
from far friends or an order I sent for rare seeds
or web word of some poet I'd neverwise read.

It's the look I adopt as she tells what the agent told:
Build your Facebook Friends list to numbers untold
to find success in your field. Or when I behold
stacks of dominoed trivia, faces attached, yucky as mold.

How this world twirls through our trendy trends,
gyres madly and taws good sense in endless spins.
All rubbishy is how it seems,
product of the worst nightmarish dreams ...
but just now I plucked from these reams and reams
of rubbish a photo of how a granddaughter beams,
then word that Virgil mourned and still Roethke sings.

The Executioner

He waits with readied rifle
or dangle of his thick braid of rope
or maybe with just the quiet found
in the grains of brown river water.

He may jump out from behind
a tree along the pathway
through deep woods and terrify us
before we have time to compose ourselves.

But if we see him leaving his home
at dawn with a sigh of resignation
for the coming day's work upon his lips,
we should have time to prepare a smile

of welcome. If false, it is still
heartening. If we are lucky enough
to keep our wits about us,
we might clasp his hand

and wander on together with wonder
at how the trees of the dark forest
keep their silence for so long
before they, too, fall down.

Young Marie Set to Watch

Clara Schumann talked with the doctor
and, at thirteen, Marie
was set to watch her mad father,
but when his door flew open,
slammed shut again, what
was a child to do? Dashing
in at last, she found him gone,
all doors agape
and empty as a robbed vault.
Next she saw him river-drenched,
held up by those who dragged him
back to madness. From above,
the children watched him driven away.
Two-and-a-half years, locked away.
From that window Marie was set
to watch everything
while Clara wildly fled to work,
escaped the rooms full of suffering,
did not sit with darkness,
though darkness encircled
her every step. Marie kept watch
on all the spirals of misery,
a clear-eyed, calm bearer
of mercy. How can such a miracle
be born in such a world? How can
vibrations, shifting tones shake
the air and lift our hearts,
carry us out of all we know,
keep us watching what we must?

Carol Hamilton's recent and upcoming publications include work in *Blue Unicorn*, *Caveat Lector*, *Atlanta Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Lascaux Review*, *Narrow Fellow*, *Bluestem*, *Sow's Ear Poetry*, *Tar River Review*, *Presa*, *Nebo*, *Main Street Rag*, *Abbey*, *Gravel*, *Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Hurricane Review*, *The Aurean*, *San Pedro River Review*, and others. She has published 16 books: children's novels, legends and poetry, most recently, *Master of Theater: Peter the Great* and *Lexicography*. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has been nominated five times for a Pushcart Prize.