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 Baedecker"), 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.

Harris Feinsod

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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 Thalassinos" (the Greek poet, George Seferis), "the Cusan" (Nicholas of Cusa?), "Baca" ("biblical Baca"), (Luis) "Cernuda," (José) "Gorostiza," "the Intrusive, Insubstantial, Hypertensive, and Insulting Ronald Firbank," "Thomas the Pythagorean Scot," "Langston" (Hughes), "Bruno," "the Carolingian," "Aden," "the Parisian,"

"the Egyptian," "my Ecuatoriano," and perhaps most curiously of all, "Daisy Fawcett." Wright's sobriquets, which leave the origins of many figures in obscurity, suggest a symposium of intimates, or a gallery of alter egos. "Baca knows I have proposed my own double," Wright writes, "rising from the ensemble of the dead."

The voice of a poet who finds his "double" in so wide a variety of figures and traditions is necessarily unpredictable. Wright deploys his exotic cultural importations with incantatory intensity, then swerves into droll urbanity:

Now that Alexandria has died I would offer you a choice of stones white limestone from Tura, the red and black granite out of Aswan, gneiss from the Nubian desert, basalt from El Faiyum, Egyptian alabaster from Tell el 'Amarna all the rocky solace that makes sitting at the tail of Porto Alegre, above Buenos Aires, you might say, tolerable.

Wright can also be piercingly accessible. In "Galileo perhaps believed that flowering pear," his poetry, conversant with so many cosmologies and personae, addresses the most common stellar constellation, "my old friend, the Big Dipper":

with the two stars sitting tight in a cluster that moves away from me. All things move away from us.

"All things move away from us": the physicist's picture of a forever expanding universe becomes an emblem for the vicissitudes of life. But Wright is likely to be allusive even when he seems least allusive:

So I will take my walk toward El Farol and the tacos and beer that comfort me; certainly, in that shade, I can contemplate this Monday evening's promise, a boatride through my own disappearance.

Wright, who was born and raised in New Mexico, slyly invokes a famous equation in game theory: "The El Farol Bar problem" demonstrates the logical

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 *Disorientatons: 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