hypotheses, and experiments within a system. Meanings are not found "out there," beyond the text and the language used to assemble it, but rather, for Silliman, they are found in the connections between words, and between words and sentences.

Herein lies the difficult pleasure in reading this work. Difficult because it challenges my expectations of how a poem is supposed to behave; pleasurable because in refusing to lead me along a narrative, the text forces my brain to assemble patterns and associations that are unique to me. This means that the reading I have done reveals my own thinking processes and not necessarily the writer's intentions (which I have, perhaps mistakenly, tried to communicate here).

Still, I lament the fact that *The Age of Huts* lacks an introduction—reading the book is like looking through a telescope pointed straight into a uncharted mass of stars. Without an introduction, *The Age of Huts* leaves it to the reader to decipher causality, to insert her history in place of the book's. The book ignites and excites my thinking—but only because I know what I know. And in spite of all that I know about postmodern theory, I still want to know the "why" behind Silliman's radical approaches to language.

Assumptions of "active" reader-reception, often recited in reviews of Language poetry (I actually was trying to avoid it) raise plenty of red flags. Silliman's work anticipates this skepticism, and sometimes even engages it. For example, entry #173 in "The Chinese Notebook" recounts the response of a friend and "member of the Old Left" who challenges his aesthetic. "How, he asks, can one write so as not to "communicate?" Silliman replies, "It is a more crucial lesson, I argue, to learn how to experience language directly, to tune one's senses to it, than to use it as a mere means to an end." The friend replies, "I don't understand."

Not understanding Silliman is a perfectly reasonable response. We often look to writing to discover meaning in our lives, as if my "I" or my "soul" is something to be figured out, a puzzle to be completed. But the "I," according to recent work by cognitive scientists such as Douglas Hofstadter, is the rich convergence of patterns based on my individual experiences, associations, relationships, and attempts to amass knowledge. Silliman's work makes a similar point. If I'm going to make it through *The Age of Huts*, I'm going to have to activate patterns and associations that are particular to my knowledge-base.

This may not be an appealing exercise for many readers. Even if my "I" is the sum total of the experiences stored in my brain; even if language is a system of signs that creates an illusion of truth; even if meaning is basically a delicate pattern of mistranslations, most readers still expect literature to help us find meaning in the world. Silliman's poetry won't do this for you. Rather, readers of *The Age of Huts* will be challenged to figure this out for themselves.

Kristin Prevallet

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Kamau Brathwaite, *DS (2): Dreamstories 2*. New York: New Directions, 2007. 272pp. $18.95

*DS (2)*—the characteristically cryptic title of Kamau Brathwaite's latest work—stands for *Dreamstories 2* and marks its status as a belated sequel to the little-known but poignant *Dreamstories* (1994), which recounts the poet's private musings through the murky but magical lens of sleep. More precisely, however, *DS (2)* is not so much a follow-up as a reinvention of the original text, and there is a great deal of overlap between the two: of the nine prose poems in the collection, five are borrowed from *Dreamstories* with little change. Although this creative recycling may invite disdain from some readers, those familiar with Brathwaite's work will recognize that this harking back to the old is both a central part of his poetic project and a perfect manifestation of the dream-world that he seeks to create.

Brathwaite's work is well suited to the conceit of reverie. Written in his signature "Sycorax video-style"—an experimental typography consisting of bold fonts and pixelated images produced in response to the death of his wife in 1986—the poems are kaleidoscopic contortions that adopt the logic of dreams. Protean characters float through the stories and find coherence only through webs of relationships. There are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, cousins, and friends, but identities are rarely fixed; they share names, switch personae, and even shadow each other as unexplained doppelgängers. Words similarly melt into each other, producing endless slips of the tongue that highlight Brathwaite's penchant for clever puns. His self-styled "nation language," which blends standard English with Caribbean Creole, is fluid and adaptable, but also, at times, elusive to the unaccustomed ear. Darting through wormholes of time and space, Brathwaite's first-person narrator imagines an ethereality that is at once perfectly lucid and utterly opaque:

> I had been looking at light thrown onto the sky
> not from the whisper of plumets that had opened my eyes
> not even from radio fires on the distant island of Skye
>
> but from the everyday light of the everynight streets reflected upon
> that flag-pole of white/steel & that that everyday light catching the
> tips of the pool had created those close two Gemini stares
>
> in my head & that that short thinner staple behind them
> had burnish
> the speartip of light

> & that the main body & shaft of that banner of night in-dented &
> cleft along its long length like the balancing muscles or scales on either
> side of your spine
>
> were the two simple ropes of the halyard dividing itself
> in the sky into that doubling stream of the snake
>
> of the universe flowing with counterless stars
> toward the black hole of the moom

Braithwaite describes his own art as "writing in light" (an expression, it would seem, referring to the electric glow of a computer screen) and this celestial topos reflects the sense of cosmic chaos that governs his work. Stars are "thrown onto the sky," just as letters are thrown onto the page, where they constellate into dense linguistic patterns: plummeting comets contract into "plumets," stars verbalize into "stares," and the moon becomes a mimetic palindrome—"moom"—which, beginning as it ends, evokes the shape of its referent. Brathwaite may risk his speaker's trustworthiness with this kind of wordplay; if "cowl" is "cold" and "cold" is "gold," how do you know what to believe? But his linguistic acrobatics—"bracket" for "bucket" or "praying" for "playing"—are not aimed at deceit or trickery but rather show a brazen delight in the promise of alternatives.

Despite these pleasures, however, Braithwaite's dreams often seem no better than the reality that they seek to evade: many are nightmares that expose a hellish state of unrest in the poet's native Barbados. The collection's primary focus, nevertheless, is more personal than political. Its grim tone finds its backstory in the tragic moments of Brathwaite's own life: not only the passing of his wife, but also the havoc of hurricanes, poverty, and even 9/11 (which Brathwaite witnessed firsthand from his home in New York). The crude brutality of some of the scenes is unnerving. In one, for example, a male character cuts off and eats another man's penis. A Freudian reading of such trauma is available, of course, but the point, for Brathwaite, is more explicit: this pain is not symbolic, but all too real. "I watch him bite / it like in half / like a small snake or shrimp or a fife of sound / & swallow the fat red bleeding part of it nearest to him…& toss-way the head the way you wd toss-way a dead eel or fish-head into the sea."

Amid this rough emotion, a softer side of tragedy emerges, in which the speaker's cynicism gives way to something more forgiving. When the loss of a loved one prompts "morn. ing breaking into leaves into tears into soft heave(s) of showers i suppose into last kisses into like shake-sh / ak softly into water into the sound of a rainy day," one realizes that violence in the world conceals the vulnerability of a fragile heart. A similar sentiment is evoked in

the collection's opening dedication (to Sycorax, Shakespeare's witch-mother and Brathwaite's longtime muse), which promises to "seal these stories…w/a new humility." Although these words might seem ironic in light of the brashness of Brathwaite's poetic form, they reflect a sincere effort to relieve the divisive pressures that haunt the Caribbean psyche, and to address the clash between colonial education and native culture. This clash is one in which the Barbados-born, Cambridge-educated Brathwaite has long been entangled, but *DS (2)* presents a new insistence on a more conciliatory perspective. In the past, Brathwaite has railed at the inadequacies of a school system that privileges snowflakes over sand; the first story of *DS (2),* however, marks a willingness to cooperate. A remembered encounter with an old professor sparks a crucial question—"How does the trained pr-/ospecting intellect/ual. >/deal w/its opposite…?"—which, though left open-ended, finds its answer in the speaker's sympathy with his teacher's struggles.

A revelation of similitude resounds throughout the collection, with subtle structural and thematic reminders cropping up to remind us of the poet's opening pledge. A panoply of references to the Western literary canon permeate the text and reinforce the vision of a world in which all is connected: the first story conflates the sylvan Cambridge campus with a Dantesque woodland and leads, in the final "Salvage(s)," to an invocation of Eliotic musicality.

It is with this thought in mind that one best grasps the value of *DS (2)*'s redundancy, which is otherwise something of an oddity to those familiar with the original text. The repetitions should be understood not as mere duplications, but rather as exposed layers in a process of literary evolution, the underwritings of a poetic palimpsest. History, for Brathwaite, is sacred, and the overlapping shadows of old poems, in *DS (2)*, act as markers of the poet's faith in the restorative power of remembrance.

Courtney MacNeil

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Tim Atkins, *Horace*. Oakland: O Books, 2007. 76pp. $12.

*The following is the third chapter of an unfolding critical novella on current British Poetry, to be entitled* Corroded by Symbolysme: An Anti-Review of Twelve British Poets, Being Also a True Account of Dark and Mysterious Events Surrounding a Famous Poem Supposedly Written by Frank O'Hara. *The final installment in this series will be released in the next issue of the magazine.*

The readere of the previous section of this serial reviewe will recall that in 2004 I had the mixed pleasure to spend a spring afternoon in Cambridge,