

2020

Cognitive Dissonances

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Recommended Citation

Adcock, Betty (2020) "Cognitive Dissonances," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 47, Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol47/iss2020/9>

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Cognitive Dissonances

That was a time I may have dreamed or may
have lived, the one with birds and hyacinths,
quilts with whole lives in them. I remember
my grandmother making cutwork linens, fig preserves,
soups, and cornbread—the encompassing tasks
to which such women were tethered. I still have
the impossible size-three, pearl-trimmed slippers
in which she weathered her wedding.

I can almost want that slow succession of days, rows
of sealed jars in the pantry filled with tomatoes,
okra, peas, dewberry jam—the whole summer saved.
Later the smokehouse would hold November's
slaughter: hams, sausage, bacon sweetening
in the fire's breath.

In that county, the children
who made it to the age of five would live,
sturdy replicas of their parents sent out
into our world's incessant wars.
The lost ones beneath stone lambs or perishing
wooden crosses were seen to be *God's will*,
cause of a harsh but guiltless grief.

My first real playmate was black and exactly
my age. Her family's house sat in a pine copse
in our pasture. Mae Willie and me—we grew wild
together among field flowers and pecan trees.
We'd climb the chinaberry and jump, chase
the hens to frenzy, tease the goat.
Then we'd swim in air, flat on our stomachs
in the plank seat of the two-rope swing,
watching the sun set over a garden
alight with corn and melons.

Sometimes we walked the train tracks below the farm,
balancing parallel with our arms held out.
I think we believed we were on the same journey,
one probably lifted from a Saturday matinee
we both saw at the one movie house, though never
allowed to sit together in the seeing.

Now is new weather beside the rising rivers,
an oppressive rainless air, or flood, or fire—
and few animals but ourselves, still making wars.
There are still children on the ancient tracks
unable to look back or turn their sight
from the oncoming, blinding forward light.