

The Good Harvest

By Christine Meyer Ponsford

Book Review:

Lightered: New and Selected Poems, by Van K. Brock. Anhinga Press, 2005.

Van K. Brock is a classical poet in the sense of being connected to the earth, the changing seasons, life cycles. His book *Lightered: New and Selected Poems* could stand as Brock's lifetime achievement, although readers, after having consumed its poetry, may simply never allow Brock to retire. This thick collection chronicles decades of world events, travels, and observations through a mature, experienced, and intelligent mind and voice.

Lightered is a world history book detailing the horrors of the Holocaust, transporting the reader forward in time to the Civil Rights movement, then, finally, driving us up to Graceland to pay our respects to our second fallen King. It is a stack of family photograph albums spread out on the living room floor, where younger generations try to concoct a family tree. It is a book of mythology, a travelogue, a diary, a collection of dramatic monologues for the gifted actor. It is a primer for the fledgling poet looking to discover the world of poetic form. It is a shoebox filled with yellowed love letters.

Van K. Brock is what Robert Bly would call a "leaping poet." Brock's poems move fast from image to image, with the spaces between those associations so large, as to, at first glance, seem unconnected. The reader must often stop to regain balance, as if on a too-high bridge. The poem "Novas," for example, jumps from azaleas to ants, to pimps and dead whores on the streets of L.A., to the big blue planet we call home, and to this excerpt:

here all worlds that ever existed still exist in an eye
for which time is merely the spatial lines of perspective,
and Plato, Dante, Einstein are silent red songs on a bush,

interlocking cones of perception, sequential, burning
together, . . .

This poem is long and hard and requires more from the reader than just a single glance or a cursory read.

One finds herself reading these poems over and over, underlining passages, circling words, making notes in the margins, counting syllables, deconstructing a shape to discover a particular form, grabbing the nearest innocent bystander to listen, as Brock's poems are openly spoken. At the end of the day, like a farmer surveying his fields, the reader feels invested in Brock's poetry, as if we, ourselves, had been part of the creative process. We're tired, but the harvesting has made us stronger, better, and it feels good.