

DESERT ODYSSEY, FEBRUARY, 1991

This endless sea is dry, its wavy crests
designed of sand, its granulated tides
eternally unscheduled, owned by wind.
Or gravity when overburdened heights
slide down a concave swell. Sometimes disturbed
by men in motion or their weaponry.
A mortar shell will spew a mighty splash.
A hole fills up like leakage in a bilge.

Could be the desert has its own Poseidon.
And if he chose this realm for peaceful rest,
his hideaway for secret meditation,
he's now incensed at savage noisy lights
that rip the dark and craze the blistered sky.
If so, this god must be enraged enough
to pour his bile on mortals setting fires
that char the clouds, and blasts that crater hell.

My own seaworthy ship: a tank with eyes
to leap horizons, pierce the dark and relay
images Athena couldn't conjure up.
My crew is trained but none is battle wise
like those Odysseus commanded once.
I make myself no such comparison,
no hero. No enchanted sojourns, nymphs
or ogres-- ah well, maybe counting colonels--

My Army unit got called up and here
I am, late of a college classroom where
I taught the classics: Homer, Virgil, Dante,
themselves no strangers to the Fates and war.
And like all men who fight on foreign ground,
I wonder when I'll see my wife and home.
Professional professor, weekend soldier
for years-- no incongruity in that--

If one exists, it's in the harpist there
on my right flank, the best damn driver here.
A tank-jock's normally a tougher cut
than he who plays as if retained from birth
to grace Hellenic halls and royal feasts
with Meneláus praising his sweet hands--
those proven hands that bully steel and heat,
commanding his big thunderbitch with verve.

Deployed in battle line, my bulky fleet
of blunt and roaring vessels sailing sand
is on alert. Our thermal sights blip full.
Identified as enemy, I still
beg instruments for every shred of knowing.
These guns make pale Lord Zeus's lightning bolts,
make trash of other tanks. Our radios
have words. The column is approaching fast.

I give the order to destroy the targets.
Incredible the way our rounds locate
their marks, make tracks and turrets flash and soar.
Grey-eyed Athena gasps, her aegis high
above the rubble, sending us a hawk,
a grey-backed raptor screeching victory.
Her cloud expands more slowly than our eyes.
My crew exults in scores like arcade games.

In thirty minutes, wounded men arrive.
Elation dwindles in a grinding pall;
we watch as one man fumbles on his way
as if to hide a pistol in his sleeve.
On closer look, he holds his severed arm
and dies beside my tank as others groan.
Two more make winedark seas with their own blood,
Iraqi armored troops, surrendering.

This ocean's wretched wrack clings to our wake
as silica Poseidon watches, waits
astride an Arab horse or camel hump--
avenger riding on the tidal dunes
and hard-caked flats nailed down with tons of light.
Without a trident, does he wield a spade,
this unknown deity whose angst we rasp?
What sacrifice will he require of us?

Back on patrol at dawn, the goddess glows;
Homeric rosy fingers earn their poems.
The crews are sobered from the bite of combat.
Now, animated sights demand decisions.
The shapes we read are not precise enough
to leave no doubt. But if we wait too long
then we'll be in their range. Commanders all
have grappled this chimera in their crows.

"Sweet Jesus, Cap'n, time we oughta shoot!"
my gunner cries, a blond Telémañhos,
his tongue undone, his trigger in control.
The radio confirms no other tanks
of ours are in this sector. No more choice,
our time runs out, I order the attack.
How many gods and men have we provoked?
Please my dear God, don't let us torch our own!

As images explode we hear the news.
An error. Static, curses, "Hold your fire!"
We hit two U.S. tanks, off course for hours.
No one survived our deadly friendly blasts.
I must not break, must keep my men from breaking.
Penelopes must learn they wait in vain.
And who explains such useless costs to them?
And in this world, who can explain to me?

"Before the end my heart was broken down.
I slumped on the trampled sand and cried aloud,
caring no more for life or the light of day,
and rolled there weeping, till my tears were spent."
--The Odyssey, Book IV, translated by Robert Fitzgerald

BLOCKS OF TYPE FOR BRAQUE

I know you, Georges--
at least I know what
you wanted me to know.

(You may not want me
to know you were a
house painter first.)

Searching underneath
old brush strokes,
seizing what others
disguised, warring
with the Fauves who
were warring with
the Monet clutch--

I know you in veinous ways,
In linear ways sans shadows
In behind-the-eyes ways

 where light strikes
 mirrors in the secret vaults
 of knowing.

Trailing you
the length
of a camel's hair,
we passed at angles
on the parallax
of Hogarth's curve
blown beige and BARE--

PALIMPSEST for specks and shapes,
some knee-skinning, some bone-cracking
under the mallet
 you flatten
 your canvas
 with.

ONCE OR TWICE

I

followed behind
you close enough
to gather your dropped
bottles, glasses, trees, books,
even a guitar and a violin or two.

I GRAYED
my COLORS
dutifully.

I scraped--
Collaged--
Textured--
Scratched...

I stackeD
The cubeS
Angled so

And sometimes I was

near enough
to notice
Pablo using
your best stuff

APPALACHIAN AUNTS

I used to visit them in summer on that razor ridge,
that dark arching brow over pooled clouds below.
Sometimes I could hear the coal mine whistle
riding an eerie chill on a half-moon fog.

Both of Daddy's sisters had cedar cabins up there.
They fed me the "best milk-fried corn 'n greens
ever t'smile all the way down your swaller pipe,"
as Aunt Amy described it. She and Aunt Lissie taught me
how to make fudge, throw pots on a kick wheel, glaze
them red with iron oxides, make perfume from bergamot.
Watching them care for Uncle Rowan taught me patience.
I liked their calling me "more sis-like than nicely".

Aunt Lissie had a wall of state fair awards for quilts.
Last thing she made me was a quilt of her blue ribbons.
She worked by coal oil lamps till her cat knocked one
over, set fire to her sewing basket, charred the floor.
For years she argued against electricity: "You get all
them lights up here and then you cain't see the stars.
I been watchin' Venus rise over Beckley's Knot in spring
since I was high as the churn. Ain't nothin' like
mountain nights for watchin' stars." She'd name them,
end up pointing at Sirius with two warped fingers,
one tough as her brogans from never wearing a thimble.

Aunt Lissie played the church organ and Aunt Amy led
the choir. They used to sing to me when I was fumey,
orchestrating with spoons and combs, slapping thighs.
I grew tall as Aunt Lissie, taller than her sweet cane
and Aunt Amy's big plate-faced sunflowers. Uncle Rowan,
getting shorter, creaking in a willow rocker
with his jelly glass of shine and a screw-top jar
of black sputum, bet me I'd never come back after college.
But I went to his funeral, and a month later to Amy's.
"Too big a dose o' flu and not enough o' her," said Lissie.

Sometimes Aunt Liss spent a week or two with me away from
switchbacks, Joe-Pye weed, coon dogs belling in the gap.
I asked her to stay but she'd look out at star-starved
city night and point to herself: "Ole Dog Star don't move."

Her tall pointed gravestone tilts toward Sirius now,
Amy and Rowan nearby. At the cemetery on the summit,
I recall all the lavish gifts they gave away.

^{how}
I don't know much is them, how much is mountain magnetism,
but I keep returning. I stay for the stars, sudden as popcorn
in a black iron skillet, more vivid than anywhere else.
And I know the ones in their crowns are even brighter.

THE HUNGERING

My times have grown leafless, my core
rustles softly like a brown husk in the wind.

I long to find my niche, to believe
in ancient promises like the five-inch owls
living inside hollows of aging cactus plants
and other mean places, and whose bellies
are often hollow.

Yet they, with wings to soar and leave,
do not leave-- choosing the desert,
choosing the wild knowing, the patience
of sand, the feral contentment of stars,
certain
those other kinds of emptiness are worse.

A FRIEND LIKE JOHN

A friend like John
is sun slanting
through a stained glass window,
lighting a dismal morning.

A friend like John
is ice rattling in a pitcher
of limeade on a 99-degree day,
or finding forgotten money
in a jacket pocket when you're broke.

A friend like John
is a pair of fur-lined gloves
warmed by a fireplace
and brought to you when
you're cleaning snow off
your windshield with bare hands.

How fortunate
is anyone who has a friend like John.
And we are the most fortunate of all
because we have John himself.

John Cather is a oner. John Cather is a winner.

--Glenna Holloway

NARRATIVE IN WHITE

Arctic people have ~~more than a hundred~~ words
for snow-- nuances of texture, depth, duration.

My middle America snow is deep chalk dust,
unnumbered chapters of the she-wind's diary.
She doodles idly, sometimes erasing her secrets,
terracing, pot-holing, building dunes.

An old metaphor, the snow as an open scroll
for a poet's musings. But this is not my tale.
A used quill lies on the river bank
where mallards keep journals in precise graphics.
A raccoon's symmetrical syllables run bias
from pine margin to margin. Variable versions
of blue and gray underline each entry.

I trace fox printing half a mile. The fox
hunts and pecks, punctuating with his nose.
The theme, ancient as the mouse, is polished,
proofed, sentimental quotations deleted.

The next page bears elongated strokes
of a rabbit, inscribed with emphatic periods
from its cottontail. Over here--
a sudden cursive shift--wide spaces between dashes.
I expect the paragraph to be followed by the fox.

The plot changes. Hawk wings interject
a quick sweeping signature. In an uneven indentation
the rabbit's sentence ends abruptly.

I retrace my rough scrawl
across February's broad shining sheets,
pondering how many small dramas my eyes missed.
And trying to recall the Inuit word for bloody snow.

--Glenna Holloway,
GRANDMOTHER EARTH

ELUSIVE LOTUS
(*Nelumbo lutea*)

Rarer each year like undisturbed water,
discriminate as royalty, it still finds
secluded places to push five feet above
rounds of green and warm reflection:
Pedestals for a visiting Kuan Yin,
a Nile prince, an American summer-lover.
The crown jewels of July.

Blossoming sometimes bigger than your head,
blessing selected Southern lakes and ponds--
Reelfoot, Mississippi backwaters, bayous--
cupping sun around a gold dais
waiting for another worshiper to step up
with apologetic offerings
of insufficient praise.

Earth's grounded flowers can't compete.
Other water lilies, too white, too small
and insecure to rise far above the surface,
float their briefness low among their leaves,
bobbing prettily, leaving no will.

Long after the lotus chalice overflows
with Chickasaw moonlight, long after
spilling its legends, it covets its seed,
changes its gilded kiosk to green
to woody brown, and keeps its place.
Sunward it toasts nutty treasures
to ripeness, daily widening their berths.

When summer goes,
the lotus bows to the source, bends sharply
to pour itself back in chosen waters.
Pods and remnant pads make promises,
still asserting beauty in ripples of freeze.

EMBROIDERED IMAGE
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Save the breathless cliches. Don't call it proud, free, noble. This raptor inspiring rhapsodized hyperbole needs no gilded pedestal--only a less shaky natural perch.

Our nation's emblem isn't free nor is it bald.
Captive of our times, flight can't save it.
Our dregs seep in its food chain,
our wires electrocute it. Some people shoot it.

It doesn't lead bomber squadrons with lightning clutched in claws; it never steals lambs, it eats mostly fish--but it may steal them. It mates in the air, a flurry of feathers and talons.

It masters up to seven feet of wings with grace,
builds enormous, stinking aeries of sticks
for a lifelong mate plus one or two eggs a year.
The first hatchling often kills its sibling.

Still, if you see a bald eagle, you'll feel high
as that silhouette sounding like wet sheets
on a March clothesline. You'll gaze at a bird
worth more than myths and worn-out words.

DARK KINGDOM, UNIVERSAL REIGN

They surround us. Excrescences of patience,
lowliest of the living: The fungi. Essentials
that neither flower nor fly. Bizarre buzzards
scavenging all realms. Picking up after men,
harvesting every loss.

Silent, unthanked, mostly unseen,
they return the salvage to needy Earth.
Spewing secret smoke, anointing everything
with clouds of spores, their truth threads
whitely through the nether beneath our steps.

Memory stirs with centuries of frowns,
the quick clutching of cloaks
encountering devil's bunions, devil's spit,
devil's cups on a woodland stroll.
Appearing overnight from nothingness,

such flora of canker and decay, men once said,
could have no root but hell. As we alter
surfaces, expand, our reparations never enough,
the fungi thrive-- limitless--
inventive to a fault. Aftermaths of falling.

Chins high, men move ahead, fastidious,
deluded, not knowing the future fails without
these agents of change, meters of larger time.
Some forms push tall, smelling of the grave;
a few tempt touch with orange, cerise, elf charm.

And some, posing benign, demure
as the serpent's proffered apple,
still invite any who will
to taste the legends. Some men do.
And sometimes-- some enter the kingdom early.

Many North American natives believe that wild game makes a present of itself to a worthy hunter. The debt is paid by a man taking no more than needed to feed his family.

AFTERNOON FAWN
(Odocoileus virginianus)

Your mother is nowhere near.
She'd have stomped a single muffled drumbeat
before her rump flashed a white flare.
And you'd merge with the vanishing point
in the musky collage of hypericum and bur oak.

Already minus your spots,
first ground-hugging pattern faded,
your budding tines punch through sueded taupe.
Your splayed legs look as if an inept sculptor
made your armature from the wrong gauge wire.

You uncock your intended spring and stay still.
Your eyes and nose lavish me with curiosity.
Clearly you would let me touch you.
But you must learn certain lessons
about my kind. The county has counted
more of your kind than the forest can feed.
Thickets of decisions have been planted,
dug up, replanted.

The dilemma grows. It is painful
to imagine you starved,
beauty savaged by woodland recyclers,
hungry children denied your meat.
Yet, man, the meddler, seldom solves the whole,
the interlocking rings he doesn't fully fathom.
Nature is well-rehearsed, time her ally.

This minute, young confidant, is ours,
this wonder we share.
With regret, I sharply clap you away.

KING TUTANKHAMUN:
ONCE THERE WAS A BOY WHO LOVED TO WHISTLE

Young pharaoh, I studied
your museumed effigies catching light,
posed on the threshold of blue and saffron,
paused in the old dreams from the head of Horus:
Morning renascence out of a lotus,
rolling across the arch of heaven on sun wheels,
rafting under-earth rivers near shoals
of Osiris, wrapped in the shawls of Ptah.

Mortal eyes are splendored with your accessories,
a glut of gold and gods. And everywhere
your face with your ankh-eyes
reflecting on your mirror world.
You must have seen eyes when yours were closed,
always looking at you,
a thousand replicas to fill your own.

I saw you at the bowstring-- hunter, warrior,
hero-murals of a lord, a moral for your subjects,
foiled with lapis, carnelian, turquoise.
And in the end, failed by the vulturine wingspan
and splayed serpent hood.

But back in the trailing edges of light,
beyond the artists' tales and the godsmith's tolls,
before you changed your name--
there was a smiling boy: I saw him
through a tear in the papyrus, rollicking
barefoot on sands old when legends began.
You on an ungilded afternoon.
Learning how to whistle.

It is he beneath the priceless mask:
Amarna child with puckered mouth
framing melodies for the songless ibis,
and turning Selket's head.
On moon-chilled desert I can hear him
softly behind the myth of death.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
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THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
unlasting as the corn god's shades of green.
Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,
the red-tailed hawk reeled around
the hot glare forcing shut my eyes,
tightening his circle and pouring down
his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn. Down and down
he hurls his keening like splinters of cold.
The hawk is a prophet of the hunger moon--
a time of no more corn,
a time when the deer go far,
leaving no tracks to a place no man finds.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.
For me, famine is of the spirit
while the body fuels on dried fare,
and the only sweetness comes in jars. The wings
are first to wither, then the deep singing.

Someday I will follow the hawk. I will climb
past wilding mounds of dead-gold buckwheat.
My foot will rattle shards of ancient lava,
startling a pika into the dominion
of talon and beak. I will face the she-wind
angering in the cinder cones, prying
at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master
the proper maintenance of wings.

--POET, award winner, 1992

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
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AN UNEARTHED SCROLL OF KHUFU

Who finds this may be blest or cursed,
Dependent on my mood. Among
All legacies, the pyramids
Are notable, my own and two
Of lesser size to complement
Horizons near my sepulcher.
Proclaimed as worldly Wonders, these,
Most ancient of the Seven, these
Alone survive: Kings' monuments
Of my design, my contribution.

While other Wonders crumbled, even
The mighty Zeus of ivory
And gold, Diana's temple walls,
The bronze Colossus, yes, the crypt
Of yet another king, plus things
Unworthy of the epithet,
The pyramids withstood the wars
Of sand, wild desert winds and time.
The guardian beast, unsleeping Sphinx
Still faithful at his post, is mine!

Attune your mortal sense to truth
I let you read. I was a child
Who sculpted, studied architecture,
Mathematics, natural laws.
My plans and figures laid the groundwork,
A perfect structure made of stone.
That stepped erection at Saqqara,
That jagged effort built for Zoser,
Was premature, a clumsy trial,
An early incarnation. I

Regret it but perhaps the gods
Experimented, too. In this
Rebirth, in name of Khufu, I
Fulfilled my role, my destiny:
The flawless dune I saw in dreams,
Two wizard chamberlains who taught
Me weights and measures, served me cups
Of sleep and visions, made me blocks
To stack, to incline to an apex--
Converged within my dynasty.

(cont.)

If any suppose my pyramid
A mere obsession with my tomb
Let them attend my history:
My reign was peaceful, none attacked
My realm. The laborers and cooks,
The masons, scribes and quarry men
Had well-paid work for scores of years.
Poets and artists painted me
With honor, carved my name with care.
My red sarcophagus was lined

With simple grieving of my people.
How many monarchs past or future
Can make such claims? Whose names still known?
Yes, reader, I was born a seer,
To be remembered by my symbol
Aimed at heaven's eyes. And was there
Magic shaped in tons of rock?
I tell you this, each century
The great peak stands, my ba ascends
A level closer to the stars.

SEEING DARKLY FOR NOW
(1 Corinthians 13:12)

Off last night's starboard,
morning's pale wings rise between
the moon's brow and the sun's opening eye.
We launch our own first light, unfolding
homemade flight plans, seeking planes
and angles to align us with heaven's aura.
Long past the wax and feather era,
the old metaphors that held us back,
we plod against the pull as Earth inhales.

Our probing beams waver, oblique rays
ricochet off facets of leftover night,
reflecting our flawed designs and opaque facts.

Sometimes we glimpse a certain contact point;
despite the yawning of our species,
we briefly reach a benison-bright apogee
our inner spaces are programmed to compute.

And we complete a holy circuit,
imprinting our unsteady state
with master codes and coordinates
for the collision course with eternity.

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AFTERNOON WITH THE ARTIFACTS

I almost missed it among the other displays, almost
didn't notice the thing that changed the world.

This one's named "The Fat Man," a bulbous unarmed twin
of Nagasaki's nemesis. Obsoletely catching dust,
cornered in an aircraft museum outside Milwaukee.

Hard to think it a bomb or even a weapon.
Could be a time capsule, maybe filled with oddments
of the 20th century's first third: a rumble seat,
a beaded flapper dress, a tub for making gin.
All things before my time but no more alien
than this bulging precedent shadowing the floor.
Forerunner of smaller packages of streamlined rage.
We went fast from atomic to hydrogen to smart missiles,
strange interstices filled with equations
that all tongues don't translate the same.

This huge clumsy egg is abstract art. It should seethe
with metaphor, vibrate with the voice of Isaiah
above the wails of hell. I'm curiously detached.
I'm missing something.

Maybe that first blast-- the one called "Little Boy,"
damaged our inner ears and eyes, jarred spaces
in our universal cortex so we can't relate
one thing to another. A cerebral non sequitur.

I wander among the airplanes, mostly wings of war.
More than fifty years of progress in flight. I pause
beneath a red ultralight, stare at a lunar lander,
reflect on "The Fat Man's" progeny
stashed somewhere like family insanities.

Back at the forebear, a kid scrawls
an obscenity in yellow crayon on its rough surface.
I can't wipe it off; it only smears. The kid
gives me his best scowl as he runs.

Maybe he's right. Maybe Eliot was too elegant.
Maybe the world, inured to bangs and whimpers,
ends with a single blurted scatological curse.

--Glenna Holloway,
A DIFFERENT LATITUDE, 1998

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
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THE HUNGER MOON

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soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
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--Glenna Holloway
POET, 1992

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MAKING DAY BREAK SOFTER

Black and pouring. Not a morning or a place
sun can improve. You'll get soaked
when the taxi's horn insists. I watch you
close your bag, pin on your polished wings,
pick up your hat a certain way.
I've watched it all before.

You woke me playing Debussy on your clarinet.
No one writes music like that anymore-- colors
instead of notes. Clinging to unwavering breezes
instead of a treble staff. Recorded on reels
of the spectrum.

You turned Afternoon of a Faun into a willow wind
stroking the old scar on my cheek. Opening
pores in the soft blues of my rock-rimmed inlands.
My guarded shade flowed indigo and painted us
an island. In a room not meant for magic,
your woodland legerdemain transposed me
to an ocean key, tuned me to a viridian obbligato.

You hollowed us a hurricane eye in late fall,
picked the broken glass out of dawn, let me
smell red cedars instead of damp ceiling plaster.

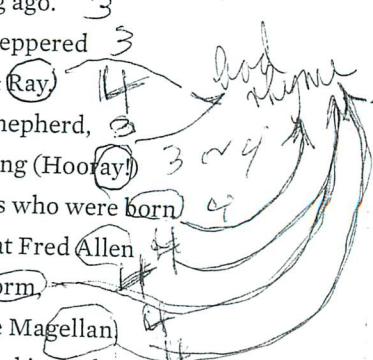
It's a way to leave me dry-eyed. It's something
I'll replay in sounds of rain in coming months.

And it may almost drown out
imagined war noise on a flight deck.

--Glenna Holloway,
RAMBUNCTIOUS REVIEW, 2000

NO PENTAMETER

MY CAREER IN RADIO

I'm a radio man for thirty-some years — 4
In St. Paul, an old variety show A
Like those I used to hear, my dears, A
When I was a child long ago. 3
To critics, my show is peppered 3
With little bits of Bob & Ray 14 
Jack Benny, and Jean Shepherd, 3
But those critics are dying (Hooray!) 3 or 4
And to twenty-year-olds who were born 4
Too late to hear the great Fred Allen 4
I am the master of the form 4 
Sailing the airwaves like Magellan 4
If a thief escapes and is not hung 4
He may be honored by the young. 4

—Garrison Keillor

Garrison Keillor's new collection, Sonnets, 1983–2008, was just published by Common Good Books.

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Glenna Holloway
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DEAR MR. KEILLOR

Your piece called "My Career in Radio"
Is not a sonnet. Faulty structure makes
The title of your book unapropos.
Your shortcut misfit metrics are mistakes.
Your fame does not excuse the mixed-up way
You carelessly departed from the norm.
No doubt you won't like what I have to say.
However, I, at least, use proper form.
Your pattern is a wreck, your rhymes are bad.
If you dislike restrictions, stick with prose.
Since I'm a sonnet buff, it makes me sad
When modern bards assume a bogus pose.
So let me slip this bee inside your bonnet--
Despite your fourteen lines, it's not a sonnet.

--Glenna Holloway

Glenna Holloway
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Arlerville IL 60565

DEAR MR. KEILLOR

Your piece called "My Career in Radio"
Is not a sonnet. Faulty structure makes
The title of your book unaprops.
Your mixed-up misfit metrics are mistakes.
Your fame does not excuse the shoddy way
You carelessly departed from the norm.
No doubt you won't like what I have to say.
However, I, at least, have used good form.
Your pattern is a wreck, your rhymes are bad.
If you dislike restrictions, stick with prose.
Since I'm a sonnet buff, it makes me sad *Glenn*
When modern bards assume a bogus pose.
So let me slip this bee inside your bonnet--
Despite the fourteen lines, it's not a sonnet.

--Glenna Holloway

No PENTAMETER

MY CAREER IN RADIO

I'm a radio man for thirty-some years — 4
In St. Paul, an old variety show 4
Like those I used to hear, my dears, 4
When I was a child long ago. 3
To critics, my show is peppered 3
With little bits of Bob & Ray 4
Jack Benny, and Jean Shepherd, 3
But those critics are dying (Hooray!) 3 ~ 4
And to twenty-year-olds who were born 4
Too late to hear the great Fred Allen 4
I am the master of the form 4
Sailing the airwaves like Magellan 4
If a thief escapes and is not hung 4
He may be honored by the young. 4

—Garrison Keillor

Garrison Keillor's new collection, Sonnets, 1983–2008, was just published
by Common Good Books.

DENOUEMENT
(*Cervus canadensis*)

Just after dawn the old wapiti arranged
his headgear among dark branches
and faced, unseen, his stalker, yards away.
Standing still as a pine bole, he watched
the human make ancient noises
with antlers against tree bark.

The watched waited-- a long time
for a kind geared to minutes. Matched
to mosaic shadows, he scanned the high forest.
Soon he made a new sound; it trebled through
the cervine brain, triggered nerves
dormant since his last rut battle.

Two autumns ago, the big bull was driven
from his cows and his browsing choices
to heal in cedar silence. Nomadic now,
wedded to solitude, he had no desire
to encounter his kind.

Disgruntled at any intrusion, he was baffled
by his attraction to the man. Lately he felt
an unknown need. His spring nubs were sore
too long. Growing a six-point rack wearied him.
Old wounds panged in his forequarters, his bones
ached. His weight was harder to raise.

The human had tracked him two days; he knew
the man wanted him. His blood whispered
that the man offered something he wanted.
The wapiti's flanks swelled, shuddered
on a long breath of piney morning.

His massive neck maneuvered his pride
free of limbs and brush. He bugled his decision
high and clear to the woodland canopy, turning
to offer his great hart's heart, startling
the man with his nearness.

The hunter's sights came up true and swift.
Grateful, he took the gift.