

Erin Schnair

Tracing a Ridge and Sensing Stone,
or Junior Clemons' FIRST BOOK(!)

SO MANY MOUNTAINS BUT THIS ONE SPECIFICALLY

To enter and return, to grasp a memory of moments and to weigh each one "specifically," is the work of Junior Clemons' first book *SO MANY MOUNTAINS BUT THIS ONE SPECIFICALLY*. In other words, to locate self within the fold, to point to a space comprised of materials and to hope we are there, somewhere within the frame of familiarity.

Dwelling in the title "specifically," the phenomena of momentary limitation arises, binds itself as the mountainous frames occupy space. And as soon as the reader occupies this space in the first poem "THE MOMENT WE REALIZE WE ARE SO HERE THAT IT HURTS" emotion charges as the lens through which sense is made: the textures of feeling become the reader's guise through Clemons' work.

This emotional responsiveness encompasses a sense of nostalgia particularly captivating in Clemons work, where nostalgia is shaded by the (dis)comfort in familiarity, an attempt to map a course through the multiple details of life to grab on to "this one specifically." Or, as noted in the title poem, "Hoping to discover a single word to describe both the getting there and the arrival." A balancing act where the terms are a wandering within memory's manifestation embedded in poetic consciousness.

Images, textures, colors become sites for this balance between specificity and sentimentality, placeholders in the mapping of emotion. In "EAST MARE SERENTATIS," shades are charged with contrasts: "white, off white, cream bone, and so on." Not even a "particular" photograph where "the shirt was blue," can elude sentiment and the shade of other remains: "Once I held the photo in my hand and I tried to find you—": the line left hanging on its edge, i.e. whereas a documentary object (photograph) holds weight, in that weight it amasses shades, textural longings, un-reliable projections of momentary recollections.

This poem, as in the first poem and many thereafter, weighs the void within nostalgia's frame (in the example above, the void is seen within the shades). Nostalgia resides in the personal: where one sleeps, as in "WE ONLY HAVE



SERIOUS CONVERSATIONS," or where one locates terrestrial position, as in "DRY BONES IN THE VALLEY." In both cases, the longing is deeply human. Clemons negotiates our intuitive gestures toward each other, whereas person embeds itself in personal as well as visceral boundary: "What I mean by people is the difference between sitting next to someone quietly and not sitting next to them. Instead you just realize they aren't near" ("WE ALL HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE JC PENNY MODELS"). Realizing that another is "not near" mirrors the time before when there was quiet and still ("sitting"). Both moments weigh a potential emptiness—the poem here dwelling in a gap in connectivity, a longing for the nearness of the person(al).

As untrustworthy as nostalgia is (and by "untrustworthy" I mean the impossibility in specificity), its boundaries too are unreliable though Clemons attempts to penetrate this spatiality: "There are people arguing outside and I hear them clearly. The word 'cresting' is used and I find myself trying to recreate the curvature of the action" ("WALKING"). My own sentimentality dwells in the moment which arises here: to recreate the curvature of the action. Here delineates the prolific task of tracing a specific site, in this case the action of human emotion, a nearness.

Arcing along the curvature of this nearness, imagination bends itself into the fold. Imagination becomes a brief site for working through the gap "You were, are, will be, yam. Close to unraveling. Woven into some other thing. 'Thing' because I am encouraging imagination I say 'fish' when I mean fishing trip. We have all gotten used to it." ("DRY BONES IN THE VALLEY") Here: a tug between what imagination (the substituted thought or the alternative curve/course) can potentially open up and what it entangles. Satisfaction is brief in complacency ("we have all gotten used to it") which still posits the insumountable task: to trace boundaries to the point where the frame reveals unreliability, the very surface of nostalgia.

The material of nostalgia is an interminable piling up of things ("resources"), which at one point is even named specifically as the "space where waste piles up" ("WALKING"). Whereas "realness" is such due to its becoming a site where materiality rests, its ability to become resourceful (as in the gathering of natural materials for a poem: "fish," "seascape," "yellow"). Whereas: the titles of the poems themselves become this very materiality, waste, colloquiality, a composition for familiar objects barely within grasp. The poems, titles, compositions showing us how our assumptions of meaning are murky, at best.

As in the images that accompany the text: textural shadings that simulate mountains, fissures, folds. Created by Alexis Petty (who is also the book designer), the images are a subtle conversation to Clemons' poems. Shaded landscapes abstract natural surfaces, and some landscapes are seen from afar (i.e. rows of grass) and some extremely close (i.e. the cracks in a rock). Both perspectives, and moreover the tactile nature of the images themselves, gesture toward perception that is both felt and sensed.

Adjacent to the images, *SO MANY MOUNTAINS BUT THIS ONE SPECIFICALLY* challenges the reader to grapple with the very function of intuition—how our senses gesture toward experience and posit understanding. As in "YOU DON'T MISS YR WATER": "Which speaks to a 'sensation' that can only be described as 'becoming real,' brought on by that instantaneous cataloguing of resources every time one enters a different room." Reality extends from subjectivity, but what is interesting here is the "realness" which emerges from sensation.

By the end, the last poem "PEOPLE OF THE WIND, HELLO FROM OSLO" forms a coda to the poems which arrived before. "I am still finding sand wherever it is I happen to look." The gap remains, or persists, no matter how much writing and rewriting imagination spurns. Echoes form momentary reprieve, "To go this long without mentioning echoes is wrong. Trying to capture the feeling of being in the shower when not actually in the shower over and over and over again." Somehow in naming the echo as such the haunting becomes acceptable. Such is the nature of wind, like an echo, it whispers back, but when it leaves a shiver in its place it penetrates. "People of the wind: please don't forget to add stones to my boat," to leave something, anything, graspable, even if it sinks. The "sensation" of "becoming real."

Wandering through memory, specificity, and sentiment, *SO MANY MOUNTAINS BUT THIS ONE SPECIFICALLY* is at times so precise that it cuts to the core of a poetic consciousness—with the enthusiasm of a fresh writer who doesn't shy away from the risks embedded in this task. Richly detailed passages are balanced by a critical engagement of what it means to be a poet resonant with the experiences of the very moment of writing itself. Read it, and you will find yourself becoming "so here that it hurts," lingering amongst each line, enveloped.

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