

*Vivian Shipley*

## **No Deliverance**

September 11, 2004

Long, unbroken, heat has driven a raccoon  
to mouth water in trays holding philodendron

I have positioned to catch early morning sun.  
With no words to share, no sign language,

to communicate, maybe to show my power  
over physical need this animal cannot control,

I set out a slaking bowl. All I do is crater  
withered grass with white ceramic. Untouched,

the water stands all day as if it held my scent.  
Remembering smoke, towers, planes, bodies

in air I'd witnessed mid-morning three years  
ago, I twist my hair around a finger as I watch

the feral eyes rimmed in black that punctuate  
arborvitae binding my yard. If I could zipper

the scar from a brain tumor that connects scalp  
hooding my skull and pull skin down to unmask

sinew, a tame heart beating, I might cut razor  
wire fear that keeps this raccoon away, stops it

from assuaging the thirst for life we both share.

## Assignment for Week Four: Poem about Another Person

Winter hardens New Haven. Wind that chips at sleeves  
and pockets makes men like Tony who croon syllables to  
muscatel then piss behind stairways on Howe Street, sad

to have hands. There were years when Tony had enough  
to rent a room at the Taft Hotel. Spring days, he would lean  
out of his window in a sleeveless undershirt. Now, he's lucky

if he gets to sleep at Viva Zapata on rice bags the cooks store  
in piles near a furnace to keep them dry. Most days, Tony  
has his own stool at the bar in Rudy's on the corner of Elm

and Howe. The bartender, Marty, lets him use the john  
with enough light to read handwriting of a twenty year old  
Yalie who doesn't care enough to dot the *i* or cross the *t*.

I'm a regular and from the state school across town. It's okay  
if I buy Tony's story for my poem by picking up his tab  
for Jack Daniels and Sam Adams he normally can't afford.

Tactful, I make mental notes as I ask, *What makes you drink  
so hard, drink shots and beer at nine in the morning?* Tony  
mumbles about Champion Auto, how he operated two bays,

two at one time. Listening, a girl with a bulldog on her hat,  
drinks coffee, leans back on a wall plastered with Whaler's  
banners, Raven's baseballs, football photos taken at the Bowl.

To show her what I know, how clever I can be, I try to quote  
*Drink? or think? better drink*. Charles Bukowski is dead  
and there's a spot I can fill. No need for me to live the lines.

For the price of another round, I can gather authentic detail,  
get Tony to talk about how he tried to end World War II  
by cutting his wrists, but bleeding was too slow. Each shot

of whiskey brings him closer to the bar, face fallen forward.  
Some days he cuts his forehead, but the bouncer lets him sit  
and drink beer as long as he's good for the business at Rudy's.

The owners, Michael and Hank, have left orders about what  
to do if Tony starts to shake his fist and mutter, *You goddamn  
Yalie! I operated two bays at one time, two bays at one time.*

## No Need to Buy *The New York Times*

Catch the week's massacre in Darfur on Saturday and Sunday scrubbing white alabaster of Beinecke Library, its walls a shield for William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

with his *tyger* and *lamb* you'll never get an afternoon off to see. But Yale is generous, lets you take fifteen minutes for coffee and a cigarette after punching the clock before you scour spirals

of red, blue, and black with Top Job and turpentine. 11,000 slabs are perfect canvas for Connecticut's night priests who spray with aerosol cans. You are grateful to them for your steady job.

The death toll, this week Iraq, never stops. Today, it's Al-Aksa Brigades' suicide bombings in Baghdad or Zarqawi televising hostage beheadings. Tomorrow, Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden,

Chechnya, or genocide in Sudan. Maybe James Jones dreamed up the title *From Here to Eternity* watching you go to work each day past Naples' Pizza. It's a sure bet the mayor won't erect

a bronze statue by Seward Johnson of you on the green: a man thickened by age squatting in a Red Sox's cap. But, hey, you're paid by the hour to clean, keep New Haven's workdays spotless.

Why should you care? Bless politicians who fuel protests. Pray Yalies keep dripping graffiti on white alabaster. Using Brillo pads on the concrete sidewalks is harder on your arms and knees.

The preceding poems are from *Hardboot* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2005)

**VIVIAN SHIPLEY** won the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award for Service to the Literary Community from the Library of Congress Connecticut Center for the Book. She also won the 2004 Paterson Prize for Sustained Literary Achievement for *Gleanings: Old Poems, New Poems* (Southeastern Louisiana University Press, 2003) which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. *When There Is No Shore* won the 2003 Connecticut Book Award for Poetry and the 2002 Word Press Poetry Prize. Shipley is a Judge for the Connecticut Poetry Circuit, Chair of the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival Committee, Connecticut State University Distinguished Professor and Editor of *Connecticut Review* from Southern Connecticut State University.