

# Cultural Daily

## Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Lynne Thompson: Three Poems

Lynne Thompson · Wednesday, November 23rd, 2016

The recipient of a Fellowship from the City of Los Angeles in 2015, Lynne Thompson is the author of three poetry chapbooks as well as two full-length collections, *Start With A Small Guitar* and *Beg No Pardon*, winner of the Perugia Press Book Award and the Great Lakes Colleges New Writers Award. A Pushcart Prize nominee, Thompson's work has recently appeared in the *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Ecotone*, as well as the anthologies, *Coiled Serpent*, *Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts of Los Angeles* and *Resisting Arrest: Songs to Stretch the Sky*. She is Reviews & Essays Editor for the literary journal *Spillway*.



Lynne Thompson by Alexis Rhone Fancher

## Hammer & Pick

Long before I came along  
a dream  
Daddy told his boys he was glad  
for any kind of work and FDR  
with his New Deal politics was his guy  
always there  
If it wasn't for the WPA, my brothers say,  
they would have had nothing to eat  
peace and glory  
Daddy's talent to draw a bow down a fiddle  
wouldn't keep a roof over their heads,  
and he was happy to go into the sewers  
instead of waiting  
glad to slip below the earth before sun-  
rise, to return to it in starlight  
Undeterred  
built a railroad  
swung the hammer & pick, the other men  
twice his size and strength, but Daddy did  
whatever he was told  
now he's done  
He didn't think of history. Hoped  
his kids would survive another  
potatoes-and-water supper

don't you remember  
 The brothers say they were better off  
 than many. They were the ones with a drum.

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## Lost Spirits

Daddy was laughing but he sat quite still  
 the day he told us what he had seen:  
 an Obeah man with one eye, smiling.  
 Daddy, young, played alone, as he often  
 did, or with boys from the next plantation.  
 He was laughing but sat quite still, his  
 eyes brooding as he remembered racing  
 up the hill he was forbidden until he came  
 upon the Obeah man with one eye, smiling.  
 We loved his stories of *Papa Bois*, of *douens*  
 with backward-facing feet, of old traditions  
 because he was laughing while sitting still  
 and looking beyond a great distance, knowing  
 between *Papa Bois* and death is a connection  
 to the Obeah man with one eye, smiling, but  
 he just looked at us then winked his left, said  
*I ran away before anything wicked happened.*  
 Again he laughed but sat so still as he spoke  
 to us of an Obeah man with one eye, smiling.

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## White Flight: Los Angeles, 1961

The woman in the window is a dead ringer for  
 Donna Reed. Minutes ago, she sent her reasons  
 for living safely off: her husband with his flask  
 of milk, his Dragnet special; their daughter with  
 Heidi-hefty curls of gold; their sons perched atop  
 their Schwinn's and armed with news about some  
 preacher named King; her man's *don't take chances*  
 drumming in her ears—*avoid the windows and lock  
 the doors*. Across the street, one of the neighbor's  
 boys (she can't tell them apart) re-mows the freshly-  
 mown lawn, transistor blaring Sam Cooke's *Chain  
 Gang*—surely no good can come of that. The boy's  
 father, his Caribbean-breeze-of-an-accent soft, leaves  
 earlier than her man, and that irks. On the telephone  
 wires above their houses, a flock of white-crowned  
 sparrows raise a squawk sensing the presence of a  
 blackbird, red hidden in its wings. *How do they know*

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she asks later, *when it's time to fly? By their sense, of imminent doom*, her husband growls, spits, reading about a sit-in at a southern Woolworth's, a version of the 5-and-10 where his kids buy Coke and waxed lips.

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