



BROWSE



Burn, and: Black Overcoat

Maggie Anderson

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Burn, and: Black Overcoat

Maggie Anderson (bio)

Burn

I've been making metaphors for the ashes in my woodstove:

dry tears, what's left after sorrow. I've registered my grievances with the mine companies in southern Maine. They stripped and slash-burned hillsides then tried to sell them for housing.

Now, the contour of the land has been so deeply altered no one can recognize anymore what it once was.

In Vienna in 1908, Hitler began to notice Jews.

The more he noticed them, the more there were of them:
Soon they became sharply distinguished for me from the rest of humanity.

Almost more than Jews, Hitler hated Slavs, with their easy tolerance and their balalaikas, their square dark men and thick soups burning in iron pots.

It was their untidiness that troubled young Adolf most, the slop of sentiment, sweat beneath wool clothing in hot rooms.

Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures, he wrote.

I have purified my room with smoke of sage and pine needles leashed into smoldering coals.

I have scattered warm ashes into a pile of gray petals.

This is my window on the world I've made, what I have come to understand from many books, from looking long at one thing burning. **[End Page 125]**

Black Overcoat

From deep inside your black overcoat
words, like a lost bird
are trying to find a way out—
now that you have begun
you won't stop and I am waiting.
What is it? What happened?

A long time ago people were hurt and you caused it.

I think you said you were *Sorry*
or *Stupid* or *Worried*.

You were not looking at me—
but staring straight ahead
through the windshield of the car
at the night and the snow.

Trapped in a house, a bird will dive and circle back
from room to room from window to chair
to any steady edge or shiny object
between lifting up and landing—
flight is what comes before telling
or just after. **[End Page 126]**

Maggie Anderson

Maggie Anderson's most recent book of poetry is *Windfall: New and Selected Poems* (U of Pittsburgh P). She is the coeditor of *After the Bell: Contemporary American Prose about School and Learning by Heart: Contemporary American Poetry about School*. Both volumes are available from the University of Iowa Press. Anderson is also the editor of the new and selected poems of Louise McNeill and coeditor of *A Gathering of Poets*.

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