

POEM (I CAN'T SPEAK FOR THE WIND)

I don't know about the cold.
I am sad without hands.
I can't speak for the wind
which chips away at me.
When pulling a potato, I see only the blue haze.
When riding an escalator, I expect something orthopedic to happen
Sinking in quicksand, I'm a wild Appaloosa.
I fly into a rage at the sight of a double-decker bus,
I want to eat my way through the Congo,
I'm a double-agent who tortures himself
and still will not speak.
I don't know about the cold,
But I know what I like. I like a tropical madness,
I like to shake the coconuts
and fingerprint the pythons—
fevers which make the children dance.
I am sad without hands,
I'm very sad without sleeves or pockets.
Winter is coming to this city,
I can't speak for the wind
which chips away at me.

James Tate and Thor Heyerdahl on Their Way to Work

Thomas Lux

This is a task!—to write a two-page essay on three new poems by James Tate. I suppose if I wasn't so familiar with his work, if his work wasn't so important to me, and if it hadn't had such a profound effect on my own work, it would be easier. But when I think of James Tate's work I think of many poems, poems that have touched me in many ways: kicked me in the heart, made me howl with laughter, put that knitting needle in my ear and slammed it into my brain . . . I won't even pretend to be objective about these three poems of Tate's or his work in general—it's this simple: he's one of the few contemporary poets who is with me every day. The single most important aspect in these three poems, and in all of his best poems, is his ability to make something beautiful out of something frightening, to put that thimbleful of joy into those things that are the saddest. After all, isn't that one of the jobs of a poet: to help us survive, to give us some kind of queer and perpetual hope? Most poets, I'll bet, are