FOR BACKLIT
In *Backlit*, Bill Benton makes an argument for words to be his sensorium. The real yields and imagination infuses it—“saying that these things came to exist because//this was that song.” In Part III he treats of six watershed poems of Mallarmé with playful, tart, and defogged excerptions, yet his median style elsewhere seems to embrace Mallarmé’s penetrative subjectivity. These are poems from the womanly side of a man’s sensibilities. The message is a mating of ideas of writing to amatory and erotic findings, an immersion in complicated mentation and a closed interior. He writes his knowledge of the cynicism of obsession with, often, a gentle lushness. High style without grandiloquence. His lyric interior life is, well, very alive.

—JOHN GODFREY

FOR MADLY
Love, carnal and fated, fills these pages. You can have it but as if in a proverb of the East, you cannot keep it except in brilliant memory. Beautiful, intense, and utterly absorbing.

—JAMES SALTER

FOR BIRDS
Witty, wry, and above all pictures you could hang on a wall, you’ll find here not only snapshots of city pigeons and a portrait of Flaubert’s parrot, but the lovebirds which are at once quintessential Benton and everybody’s Valentine.

—RONALD JOHNSON

FOR MARMALADE
Asked how you understand a poem, you paraphrase it (“thought is like a witness summoned into court, its sweetness was in its silence”) to show what you think it says. If the poem is in another language, you translate (“the wild fury sing, Goddess, of Peleus’ son Achilles…”). William Benton does both.

—GUY DAVENPORT

FOR EYE LA VIEW
This deft and whimsically virtuous Ways of Knowing will haul the reader a long way forward indeed. When Eye La View joins hands with that other old bagel, Rose Selavy (‘tho she don’t appear), anything can happen. E.g., ‘I love you too, Bill…’ Don’t Reveal The Ending!!!

—ROBERT CREELEY
LIGHT ON WATER
ALSO BY WILLIAM BENTON

POETRY

The Bell Poems
Birds
Eye La View
L’après-midi d’un faune
Normal Meanings
Marmalade
A Quatrain on Sleeping Beauty’s Tomb
(translations from boris pasternak) Backlit

PROSE

Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings
Deaf Elephants (children’s book) Madly
(novel)
The Mary Julia Paintings of Joan Brown
Reliquaries: The sculpture of Ted Waltz

EDITOR

Gods of Tin: The Flying Years by James Salter
LIGHT ON WATER

New and Selected Poems 1972 - 2022

WILLIAM BENTON

Marsh Hawk Press
East Rockaway, New York . 2022
East Rockaway, New York

In memory,
for Elaine
## CONTENTS

FROM BACKLIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Rain Dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Camera Obscura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Visible Leaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Impasse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Lawrence Snake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Tin Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Saltwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Away 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Concordance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1. Monsieur Loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2. The Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3. The Fool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>4. The Lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>5. Two Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>6. The Country Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>7. The Balcony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>8. Tree Trunks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The Climb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Winter Nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sagaponack Notebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The Jitterbug Ashes of Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Epithalamium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rider  
Backlit  
Holding Galatea  
Necessary Sorrows  
The Irina Poems  
1. Until  
2. A Shame  
3. Strabismus  
4. Music  
5. The Mad Girl  
6. Tonight  
7. Unknown  
8. Reply to Rain  
9. Small Fire

FROM THE BEAUTIFUL SMILE
“I pour the milk into”  
“I hope I can keep telling you”  
“Jake”  
“July 11”  
“It’s better on the”  
“To D. P.”  
“The one tone of the lawnmower”  
“Jo’s endings”

FROM BIRDS
Hawk  
Warbler  
Mockingbird
66  Vultures
67  Owl

68  Wren
69  Pigeons
70  Starling
71  Crows
72  Ostrich
73  Toucan
74  Sandpiper
75  Robins
76  Albatross FROM EYE LA VIEW

79  Eye La View

FROM NORMAL MEANINGS
105  A Disarray of Intimacies
105  “Of myself. On my head. The couch rides over”
106  “I am aware of all the little motions”
107  “Sweet weepy town. The hills drift, wild”

FROM MARMALADE
111  Quelle Soir
112  Sainte
113  Petit Air I
114  L’Après-Midi D’un Faune
120  Hérodiade
125  Placet Futile
NEW POEMS

135 One of Those Bells
136 Propeller Days
137 View
138 April Weather
139 Ardor
140 Seasonal Story
141 Elogues
142 Say, What’s In This Drink?
143 West
144 Chez J.
145 Predellas
148 Disaffinities
149 Summer Dreams
153 The Instructions
154 After
155 About Never
156 See the Tiger
158 Kathleen
159 Redux for J.S.
160 A Death in Crete
161 Light on Water

FROM
BACKLIT

2017
I’m the one who has imprisoned the rain dragon.

You know the story? About the dark-eyed girl who seduces the holy man and ends the long drought.

The cage where he keeps the rain dragon is a waterfall.

Your hair is a waterfall and distracts me; I lose all sense of my avowed purpose—the dragon escapes.

It rains and rains.
DINNER

Candlelight burnishes her plum sweater.

An odalisque, an ode, a no. An Eskimo.

Gray eyes partly crossed.
Pregnant.
One tooth wasn’t perfect in the front. Grieg’s small coins are thrown
from a bag filled with yellow leaves.
Arranged in a single cluster, tiny insects
with coral colored wings mimic a flower.
We knew this because they survived.
Two things happened: they lived and at the same time
revealed the veil of destiny reversed.
They lived like love, beyond disaster,
in a form entirely its own proof. Otherwise
all we’d know of them is mute absence—
nothing— another branch.
A tiny catchlight of saliva shows as she opens her mouth. In the moment of recognition, details of the glitzy room slip from focus: she stares out of the shadow of her hat—a wide-brimmed, red, feathery affair—aware of what is rehearsed in the encounter, undaunted, prepared for that alone.
THE VISIBLE LEAF

You’re still at the lab, with your hair drawn casually back.

Molecules rehearse an unceasing continuity in the visible leaf.

It was fun to see Montreux, the surprise of palm trees along the promenade, the castle with its endless visitors. I want you to be a part of the day’s attention, not an interlude, but complicit

in all the intricate and hapless details

that are the sum, the unknowable mosaic, the house that love builds for itself.
The yellow pinafore flares side to side. She doesn’t
turn her back. Set against the blank wall of the block
a switch is made without sounding to bluer depths.
I can’t get the ornament to dance. Things possess
the immediacy of their sacrifice. The moment
comes to a halt in mid-air, a faint mechanical lie.
THE LAWRENCE SNAKE

Their faces shine, grins dripping, that
came before me to drink where I drink.

In the stone trough the rippled surface
returns to a flat plane. The water flows clear
at an imperceptible rate. What makes it a woman in the first place
purifies both. Sunlight

loosens her hair. You cannot be
the husband of every happiness, D. H.
At dinner she makes an accomplice. Cackles
and peeks from behind the bones of her fingers.
Filaments of web settle weightlessly
into place. The movement of an arm draws
around her a cape of smoke. Silent,
divided against ourselves, we leave the restaurant,
baffled by the infallible performance
that requires now with her walking
up the street our pity.

THE TIN ROOM
SALTWATER

The light moves like nerves on the water
white jittery lines I can see the shadow of my head its own dark
confusions.

Palms shift in the wind. We were all silent,
the children aware, an incalculable
weight, their arms thin as flutes. I’m sorry; I can’t stay.

She steps onto the veranda, beacon, flower,
outlined against yellow squares of lattice-work and the sea
beyond beyond Bonnard.