



Archive of Style: New and Selected Poems

Cheryl Clarke

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Black lesbian feminist Cheryl Clarke's five-decade poetry career accommodated a second pursuit—a little matter of changing the world to be a better place for Black women, the LGBTQ+ community, and the disenfranchised. A veteran of the Black Arts Movement and the feminist publishing scene of the 1970s and 1980s, she is as grounded as they come, her words seemingly destined for stone tablets. After forty years at Rutgers, she runs a bookstore in Hobart, New York.

lipstick corny
for M.J.S.

Lipstick
on wineglass corny
mark of femme-memory.
sage, basil, dill, parsley
harvested from planted pots
gifts to our worthless, reckless, feckless souls,
every one.

(cigarettes oh cigarettes
—never free of nicotine's je ne sais quoi—and reefer,
jamais assez,
when your dealer dies quietly quickly of cancer.)

Then, spotting the wineglass take it up:
'I'll have wine now.'
'Red?'

'There's also Vouvray.'
'The Malbec, its bright magenta rim.'
So much cover for eros.

and a next morning memory
ephemeral
lipstick on wineglass
corny
or a gift
against our dread of naming?

MATT SUTHERLAND (July / August 2024)

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