

## Poems

John Saad

### Pneuma

The wood duck cuts the quiet air  
above us and arrives on the water.  
He swims to the island of burnt brush  
we piled up at the pond's creation—  
five acres of slash atop heavy clays,  
smoldered into a tannic reef  
for minnows and bream. We pass  
the binoculars back & forth,  
lean tight against  
the cedar porch-pillar,  
and watch him scoop for fish.  
You say his red eye sees us.  
I say it's so red it always looks open.

Then something issues in him  
to take flight west over the pines.  
We wonder if it was a menacing snap  
in the woods, or if our young pond's still too acid  
for his taste and so off to try another.  
We know this land around us—  
the Wood Basket, as it's called—  
the most of it shaped by  
fishponds and firebreaks,  
logging roads and low taxes.  
From the sky our pond  
must look like one tawny eye  
on a patchy curve of earth pocked with many eyes.  
Silently we wait for the wood duck's return.

Wind arrives through the pines.  
Wind draws itself over dead grasses.  
Wind rubs the water into pearl wavelets  
like one thousand thumbs  
pressing into clay.



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## Encroachment

*Hilton Head Island, July 2019*

Out beyond the surf, pelicans body  
themselves into the sea, not to savor  
but to rise through links of waves  
like wet roods. A fisherman takes

another dark step and casts behind the crest  
of a breaker. Then, outflanking the horizon,  
a tarpon's iron-mouthed arch  
flashes, declaring its spectral

resolve in a wreath of silver-blue glints  
originating from ages of plated scales.  
then disperses into soft swells,  
bubbleless and ready.

We never do know what to make  
of the lighted prints behind our closed eyes,  
or the thing that sweeps our leg  
but leaves us standing in the tide.

## Stones

I know it sounds strange,  
but there is a country without stones,  
where the only parables told are of the trees—  
how at the slightest touch of limb  
they bend, and how in old age  
they keep their distance,  
like old fenceposts on a knoll.

Consider a walk in such a place:  
the soft loam and duff underfoot,  
the wheel of ash rising in your eye,  
and the wet scent of pitch ushering you  
to some new rent of forest.  
The stump you find there is  
the golden aftermath of windfall,  
calling to you like a throne.

But be glad if you should trip.  
You could not blame a stone,  
even if you tried. ✱



*John Saad* lives and works in Birmingham, Alabama. His poetry has most recently appeared in *Raleigh Review*, *Terrain.org*, and *Poetry South*. His chapbook, *Longleaf*, was the winner of the Hopper Poetry Prize and was published in 2017 through Green Writers Press.