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## Winter Poetry Reads

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*Everytime a Knot Is Undone, a God Is Released*

Barbara Chase-Riboud

Seven Stories Press, \$35 (hardcover)

Renowned sculptor (most notably of the *Malcolm X Steles*) and author of the groundbreaking 1979 novel *Sally Hemings*, Philadelphia native Barbara Chase-Riboud has been less recognized for her powerful, distinctive poetry, which she has written and published steadily for decades. While often tuned-in to recent history and politics, with poems engaging figures such as Gloria Steinem, Troy Davis, and Henrietta Lacks, Chase-Riboud thrives in antiquity: “Whatever violence / I have done thee,” she writes in “Cleopatra,” “You’ve done to me tenfold. / And so we stand quits and quivering.” It is refreshing to read work that bows to no poetic trends; if Chase-Riboud has poetic sisters, they might be as distant as H.D. and Sappho. But from her idiosyncratic, at times anachronistic, stance, Chase-Riboud confronts topics of present-day relevance, such as racism and sexism, often suffusing her poems with an urgent sensuality that their formal rigidity and theatricality might at first conceal: “Our possessed bodies / Mingle with the coying odor of sanctity / A single beam of light / crosses us.” Unlike many collected poems, *Everytime* is presented not in chronological order but with a thoughtfulness to the organic flow of a life’s work. (Those interested in chronology can consult a biographical timeline in the back of the book.) *Everytime* is a necessary—and complete—introduction to an overlooked poet who is at once poised and lush, even as she uncovers the pain and ugliness “In this ridiculous mirrored palace / Of conspicuous consumption / Where I see myself, / A hysterical fool, / An aging child . . . / Doing imagined violence / To myself / Into infinity.”

—Lynn Melnick



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