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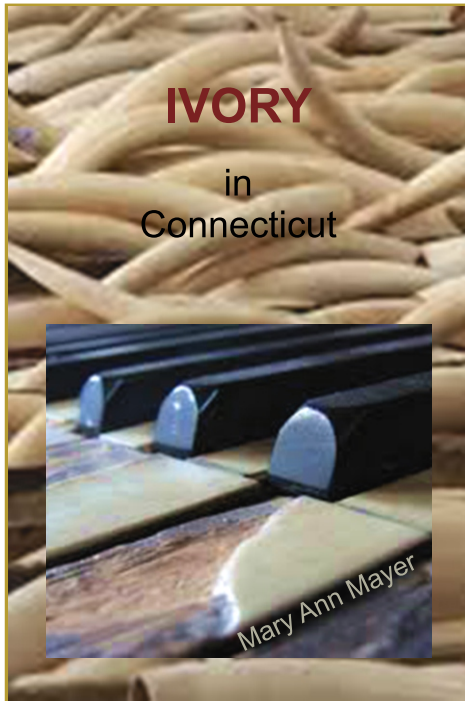
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Origami Poetry Project™

IVORY in Connecticut
Mary Ann Mayer © 2015



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If I'm singling you out,

it's to feel the pulse,

help find the key,
the skeleton key, the master key,

Then hold it till it hurts,

and cuts

till we feel its name
and say its name

and cry/bleed/grieve this one
thing that has cleaved

and cut
as ivory carried by an African slave

was cut into white keys
any one of us might have played

starting brightly with middle C.

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Images from the web

Thank you to pianist Mark Taber for his
moving interpretive accompaniment,
East Greenwich, Rhode Island,
August 9th, 2015

With appreciation to poet Martha Collins
for her book *White Papers* which provides
the conscience, historical background
and imagery for this poem

Acknowledgement

“Through 1954, Connecticut was the largest
importer of tusks anywhere in the world.
One adult African elephant tusk of 75 lbs.,
properly milled, could yield the
wafer-thin ivory veneers to cover
the keys of 45 pianos.”(CT history.org)

Play it in 1-5-4... slow enough to feel the swing—

from Black to Negro to slave to ivory slave—

over the bridge of sighs,
back to the clang of chains and iron...

Slaves carrying ivory

for 45 keyboards from one tusk,
for America's pleasure.

Play it across oceans,

back to elephant-rich, central east Africa...
tusks ripped from faces, bull elephants
dying through their sockets, sons torn

from mothers, men from their villages...

Ivory bound for 2 mills in Connecticut—

in Deep River and Ivoryton
1500 workers cut, bleached, polished, milled

each tusk into hair combs and, mostly, piano keys—
a wafer-thin veneer—the perfect cover,
the process perfected.

Ivory in Connecticut

Start with middle C
and play it back thru time, thru
the juke, the clap, the hand, the cry

back through a century
of sheet music, cannons, *Yankee Doodle*,
ragtime in living rooms—
the middle-class pastime,
before radio and gramophones
and talkies...

Play it down, down,
through cakewalks and marches,
burning mobs, “coon songs”, lynchings,
“whites only”
and whites in blackface performing...