

A Solid Thing

"I remember
a *Geographic* picture, the 9 women
of some African chief;

(Williams, *Paterson*)

Among the pictures we recall
as if they were an emblem, solid,
like a thing,

 is *Paterson's* great chief on his canoe
which seems to be a log. After him
sit all his bare, lank-breasted wives.
(The lank breast is a sign for pride,
being, supposedly, a sign
of having borne many children—
or of having suckled children long
with little food—you take your choice
according to your prejudice.)

I saw that picture
too. Should I dislike it more
than the supposed picture of
the Byzantine
who, of a hundred father's sons, killed each,
or like a queen bee kills
adjacent sisters in their cell?

The chief
admits to no dissension on his log.

Were there more women born than men? Are there,
just out of focus, lots of men
unwaited on, who line up for,
perhaps
one woman?
How is she
accommodated?
On what log
has she her unportrayed advent,
her unmusiced, unadvertised flotilla?

The chief controls his negative.
The poem its.
A solid thing
has always got two slides.

— *M. Travis Lane*