

Gently Read Literature

Reviews of Contemporary Poetry & Literary Fiction

Winter 2014



Contents

- 4—Colleen Abel on Caryl Pagel's *Experiments I Should Like Tried At My Own Death*
- 6—Christina M. Rau on Emma Bolden's poetry collection *Maleficae*
- 10—Amy Pence on reading *On Ghosts* by Elizabeth Robinson
- 12—Michael Kasper reviews the novel *Lift Your Right Arm* by Peter Cherches
- 15—Making Music from the Badlands of Horror Vacui: Virginia Konchan reviews Joshua Marie Wilkinson's *Swamp Isthmus*
- 18—Parth Vasa reviews Kirby Gann's novel *Ghosting*
- 21—David Appelbaum on Bill Yarrow's *Pointed Sentences*
- 24—Ed Davis reviews the novel *The Virgins* by Pamela Erens
- 27—Robin Martin reviews Bonnie ZoBell's short stories in *The Whack Job Girls*
- 30—Fred Misurella reviews George Guida's short fictions in *The Pope Stories*
- 32—Bonnie ZoBell reviews Valerie Fioravanti's short story collection *Garbage Night at the Opera*
- 35—Grace Curtis reviews Frances Hatfield's poetry collection *Rudiments of Flight*
- 37—Robin Martin reviews Adam Berlin's novel *The Number of Missing*
- 40—Christina M. Rau reviews John Gosslee's *Blitzkrieg*
- 43—David Berridge reviews the anthology *Homage to Etal Adnan*
- 51—Brief Alphabet of Grief: Carolyn Perry Reviews *Local News from Someplace Else* by Marjorie Maddox
- 56—Deborah Bogen reviews Gerald Fleming's prose poetry collection *The Choreographer*
- 59—Sally Deskins on Kristina Marie Darling's *VOW*
- 61—An Insurgency of Language: Stacia M. Fleegal's review of Mary Biddinger's poetry collection *O Holy Insurgency*
- 63—Suzanne Hard on Luanne Rice's novel *The Lemon Orchard*
- 65—Margaret Rozga reviews Terry Blackhawk's poetry collection *The Light Between*
- 68—Jonterri Gadson reviews *allegiance* by francine j. harris
- 71—Emilie Esther-Ann Schnabel reviews *Animal Husbandry Today* by Jamie Sharpe
- 73—Samantha Duncan reviews Alex Dimitrov's poetry collection *Begging for It*
- 75—Sing a Song of Darkness: Katherine Yets on *Hymn for the Black Terrific* by Kiki Petrosino
- 78—Help Me Solve a Mystery, Who is Who and Where are We?: Katherine Yets on Carrie Olivia Adams' *Forty-One Jane Doe's*
- 82—The Poem is a Ritual that Conceals: C. Kubasta reviews Jeffrey Pethybridge's *Striven, the Bright Treatise*
- 85—Acceptance Inside an Envelope: Katherine Yets reviews of Julie Marie Wade's poetry collection *Postage Due*
- 88—Olivia Stiffler's poetry collection *Otherwise, We Are Safe* reviewed by Margaret Rozga
- 92—Twenty Poets Talking: Robert Archambeau reviews the anthology *Password Primeval*
- 95—Channeling the Prose Poem's Ancestry: Steven Wingate reviews the anthology *Family Portrait: American Prose Poetry*
- 98—James Wharton reviews Bruce Holbert's novel *Lonesome Animals*
- 101—Shaina Mugan reviews Linda Lappin's *Signatures in Stone*
- 103—Things Redefined: Ayesha Ali Reviews *Wildwood Dancing* by Juliet Marillier

NEW

from

BOA
EDITIONS
LTD



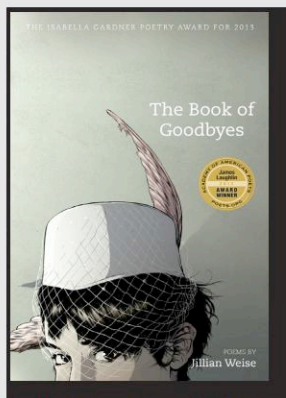
Slate of the Arts



NYSCA

Lannan

Publications by BOA Editions, Ltd. are made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



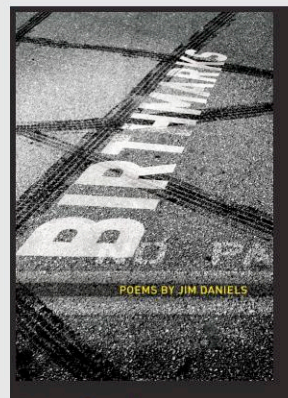
The Book of Goodbyes

Poems by Jillian Weise

Winner, 2013 James Laughlin Award

Paper | 978-1-938160-14-1 | \$16.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-15-8 | \$9.99

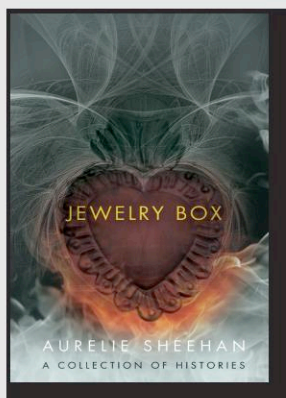


Birth Marks

Poems by Jim Daniels

Paper | 978-1-938160-16-5 | \$16.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-17-2 | \$9.99

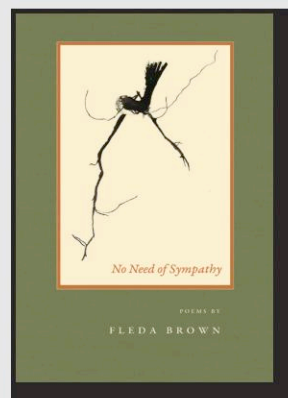


**Jewelry Box:
A Collection of Histories**

Stories by Aurelie Sheehan

Paper | 978-1-938160-24-0 | \$14.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-25-7 | \$9.99

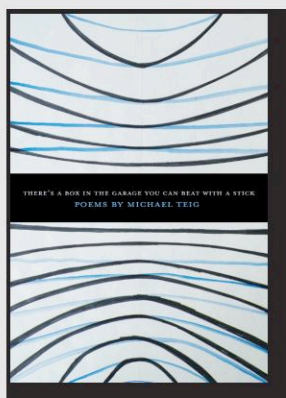


No Need of Sympathy

Poems by Fleda Brown

Paper | 978-1-938160-18-9 | \$16.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-19-6 | \$9.99

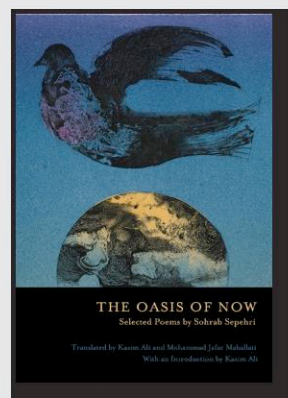


**There's a Box in the Garage
You Can Beat with a Slick**

Poems by Michael Teig

Paper | 978-1-938160-20-2 | \$16.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-21-9 | \$9.99



The Oasis of Now

Poems by Sohrab Sepehri

Translated from the Persian by Kazim Ali

and Mohammad Jafar Mahallati

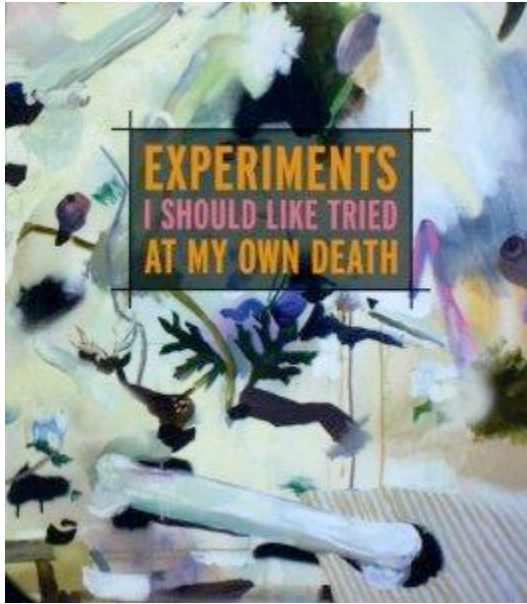
Paper | 978-1-938160-22-6 | \$16.00

eBook | 978-1-938160-23-3 | \$9.99

Support independent publishing—order titles at
www.boaeditions.org/bookstore.

BOA EDITIONS, LTD. | 250 North Goodman Street | Suite 306 | Rochester, New York

Colleen Abel on Caryl Pagel's *Experiments I Should Like Tried At My Own Death*



Experiments I Should Like Tried At My Own Death
Caryl Pagel
Factory Hollow Press, 2013

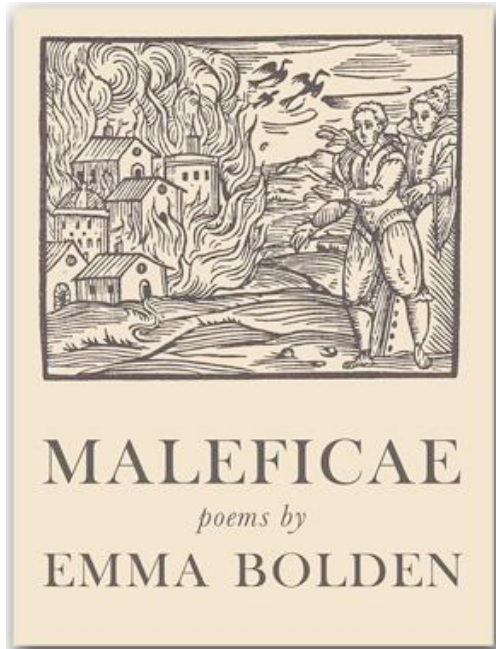
Many spirits haunt Caryl Pagel's *Experiments I Should Like Tried At My Own Death*. There is the ghost of William James, in his guise as the nineteenth century's most famous spiritualist, whose investigations into the afterlife Pagel's poetry mirrors. Edward Gorey is here, lurking behind Pagel's morbidly witty catalog poems, as is Emily Dickinson, with her herbarium, itself a kind of construction of, and against, death. Perhaps most importantly, there is some personal haunting here: whether or not the heartbreaking long poem "The Sick Bed" is an elegy based in autobiography or not, its apparent intimacy and its prominent placement at the center of the book seem to hold the source of Pagel's manic drive to wrestle with different understandings of death. But the elegy, like the book, is a postmodern one. It refuses sentimentality, consolation, answers. There is only the speaker's "own clean loss."

Pagel's book, which is divided into sections titled "Visions," "Crisis Apparitions" and "Other Exceptional Experiences," begins with the dramatic poem "Levitation," one of the many pieces reflecting supernatural or psychic experiences (séances, spirit cabinets, automatic writing and spirit photography are here, too). A sense of awe at what lies just beyond the realm of rational understanding permeates the book and can be seen in the last lines of "Levitation," when the speaker marvels, "[M]y body circled around the building & returned / through the opposite pane Tell me how that is possible; I could not see it but I was there" (13). The poem also showcases one of Pagel's favorite techniques, the drastic caesura, which blows giant holes in poems and works in conjunction with harsh line breaks, creating poems that radiate kinetic energy and tension.

One of the most satisfying aspects of *Experiments I Should Like Tried At My Own Death* is the multi-faceted approach Pagel takes to notions of the afterlife. A half dozen poems threaded throughout the collection are labeled as being “from The Botched Bestiary” which Pagel refers to in the end notes as being influenced by Steve Baker’s *The Postmodern Animal*, a seminal text in the emergent academic field of “animal studies” that investigates the use of animals or animal imagery by artists as a means of destabilizing a fixed, human-centric perspective. Pagel uses the Botched Bestiary poems to collect found language—from science journalism to the short stories of Ray Bradbury—about animal behavior and science. In the found texts, Pagel hones in on the word “body,” creating eerie echoes between human and animal contexts. In “Those That Require Warning,” Pagel collages, “‘Bodies can have a wide variety of effects, with varying levels of inconvenience.’ ‘Everyone says stay away from bodies. They have no lessons for us; they are crazy little instruments’” (22). A key at the bottom of each poem lists the animal to which each quote refers, but, run together in prose blocks in the poem’s body, Pagel’s juxtaposed texts blur the lines between people and beast, especially regarding their precarious vitalities, and their eventual extinctions.

In the end, what makes the book memorable is the way that Pagel creates sparks by constellating far-flung ideas around a single dire subject and treating them with formal virtuosity. The book never rests long on a single tone (there is nearly as much humor or sly wit as there is darkness) or a single approach, but rather shows Pagel’s range, as well as her refusal to treat a staple of serious poetry, the elegiac impulse, in any conventional way.

Christina M. Rau on **Emma Bolden's** poetry collection *Maleficae*



Maleficae
Emma Bolden
GenPop Books, 2013

Salem, Massachusetts in the American collective memory evokes the Salem Witch Trials. The events in Salem were not unique. As we find in Emma Bolden's *Maleficae*, these trials occurred across Europe, prosecuting mostly women who did not fit the ideal of what a woman should be. The collection begins in loosely four parts, each containing its own Liturgy of the Word packed into history, testimony, and the language of accusation, motherhood, and witchcraft. It ends with a section that begins with a formal reading of charges and ends with legacy. The book includes End Notes that can help with the context of the source materials, but the poems stand alone strongly without them. Most poems use caesurae expanding across the page, creating gaps to really take in the unfolding of events. The collection haunts through image, diction, and invasion of blank space through the use of blank space.

The overarching images that weave each poem together include bucolic landscape and the landscape of the body. From “The moon a sick face” to “the rabbits / pelts matted” to “God chooses / to end me in the wood's dark” to “fill my own stomach / nearly to bursting the belly that one day would be slit / as clean as the rabbits as God / makes each life with his own knife inside,” the speaker of “The Witch Remembers *Running from the Village at Midnight*” combines the natural world with the natural body, signifying both come from God. This poem also includes lines from the Requiem Mass, enhancing the opposition between what

is witch and what is acceptable religion. Grass, earth, birds, and fire unify with skin, body, hand, palm, belly, and tongues.

One particular skill Bolden uses over and over again is enjambment to create two separate meanings on the same line. In “The Witch Is Called And Answers,” the speaker offers a setting typical in many of these poems: “each cloud a gash / of mouth through which the sky / screamed rain and hail and I / was God's answer whirled wet.” The “and I” offers an end-rhyme with “sky” and seemingly ends the idea that the sky offered the self, but then the “I” works as the subject in the next line as “God's answer.” In the next poem “The Witch Remembers *Her Body As Holding*,” another typical image of skin and body emerge: “as she took / shape stretched my skin to become / no longer my body.” The “become” hangs solid on the end of the line as a synonym for exist, to state the presence of simply being; it also flows to the next line to show that the existence is fleeting as it becomes “no longer.” Bolden's use of these double-meaning enjambments throughout several poems creates a sense of unreliability on the world as well as on language.

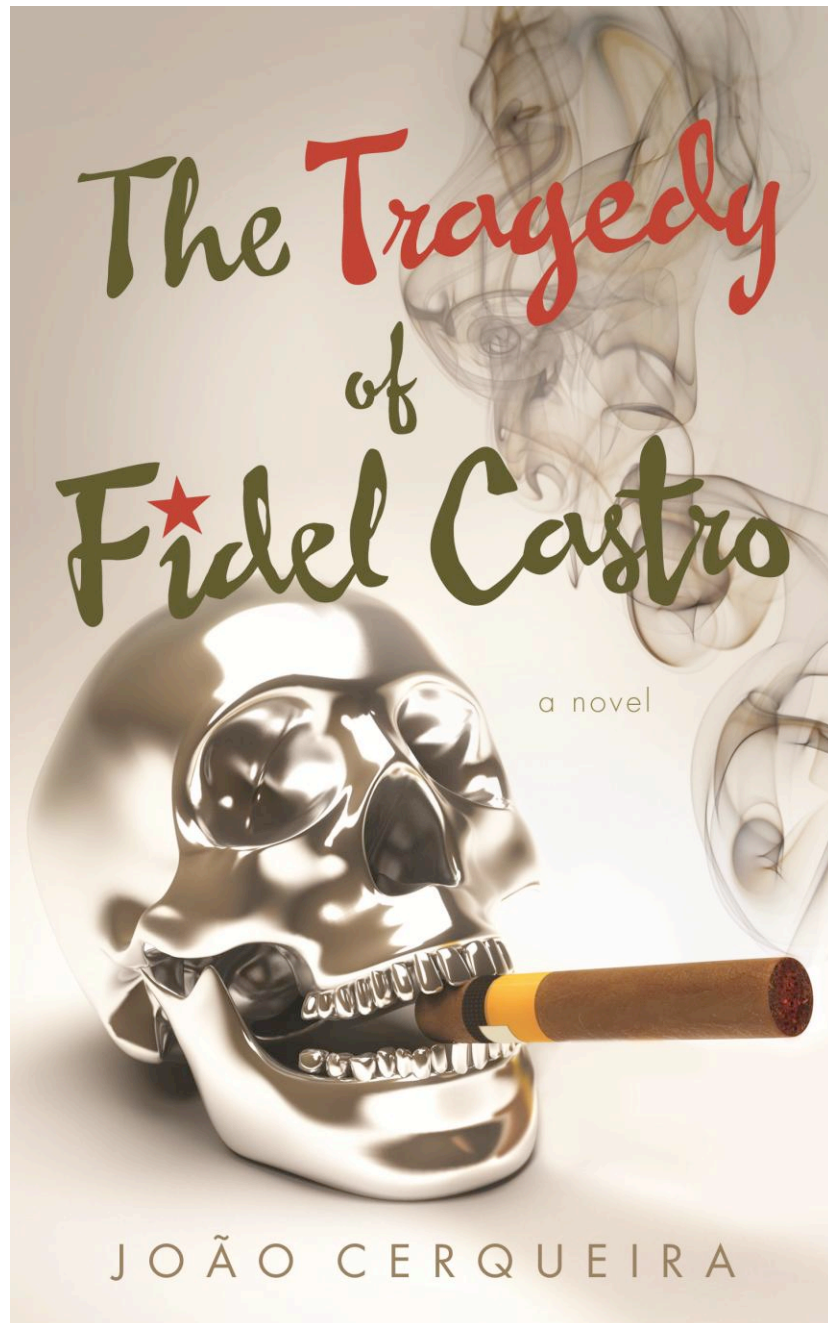
To tell one woman's story from midwife to witch, from giving life to having life taken, these poems switch speakers and points of view. Also somewhat confusing are the several poems entitled “Palmistry.” The first on page 11 indicates a prediction of men leaving; the second on page 25 tells a more symbolic future: “you will swallow you will pray / the new moon finds you bleeding / empty of what // he could give you such strange / words for shame;” the third on page 33 predicts the future in tidbits: “You will be given and taken” . . . “a glimpse of thigh / an apple that fits / his palm your tongue” . . . “you will be a creature / of hair and thorn;” the final on page 67 appears after “A Public Reading of Charges” and after the sequence of testimony. Unlike most of the poems, it has short lines and even with caesurae, remains pretty compact. It acts not as a prediction, but as a conclusion: “You thatch / roof you dirt / floor” . . . “You womb you stomach / swollen” . . . “You tongue / a bell clapping // then stayed.” While the appearance of each “Palmistry” comes within its own section, the difference within each poem might have worked more successfully had they had different titles to show more individuality within each and to help enhance the progression of poems. The repetition effectively creates a haunting tone, yet it also causes confusion as do the other titles that appear more than once. Maybe the effect of confusion mirrors the disruption of peace and creeping paranoia of the time, but a clearer path would make the heavy language more effective.

An interesting choice of order appears in the penultimate section. Each “Liturgy of the Word” asks a question from the trials. These are followed by “The Witch's Testimony” that jumps from hour 7 to 13 to 27 to 46, culminating at hour 72, which shows the tightest almost paragraph-formed poem that mirrors Biblical language during legal testimony for which the “witch describeth her God.” The witch ends her testimony discussing her certain demise: “the fire that warms and the fire that frees you of body by burning.” At this point in the collection, so many wrongs have been enacted that the witch's testimony causes relief in the trial ending, though unjustly.

The final poem “The Witch's Daughter Still Lives” flows in steps down and across the pages, incorporating every image from the collection but avoiding the Biblical and legal language. It

focuses on the fire and the body. It does not offer solace, ending with “men love / fire,” indicating more burning at the stake will occur. Bolden's ending with a new generation offers false hope, one that wrenches the heart and creates a collective guilt for humanity.

The first “Liturgy of the Word” includes the epigraph “*Maleficae dictae a Maleficiendo, seu a male de fide sentiendo,*” which, according to the End Notes, translates to “They are called witches from evil-doing, or from perceiving wrongly about faith.” These poems show how the persecutors were the ones who perceived wrongly and became the evil-doers. Bolden's collection gives voice to those who stood trial yet were not heard.



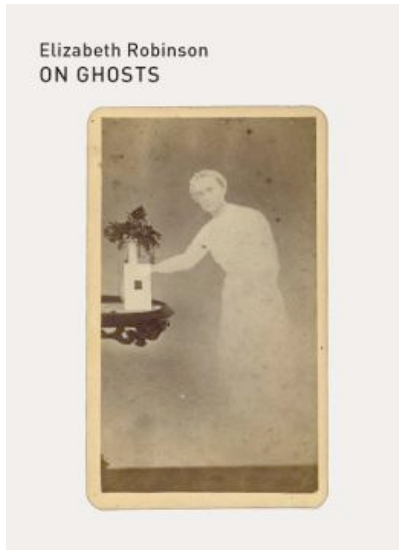
"Novels like The Tragedy of Fidel Castro are the untamed mustangs of fiction that, unlike most other books, run wild and free, contemptuous of the confinement that the corral of ordinary classification would imprison them in." –The American Culture

"This book has amazing depth and connections that bear repeated scrutiny and investigation. The Tragedy of Fidel Castro is highly relevant to our society today, and I highly recommend it." –Portland Book Review

"Cerqueira shows potential to be a big name in the future." --Contemporary Literary Review India

Buy: http://www.amazon.com/Tragedy-Fidel-Castro-Joao-Cerqueira/dp/1938416163/ref=cm_rdp_product

Amy Pence On Reading *On Ghosts* by Elizabeth Robinson



On Ghosts
Elizabeth Robinson
Solid Objects, 2013

- 1) That I am reading Elizabeth Robinson's *On Ghosts* on Halloween could be pure accident. Or is it? Could occasion be one of those "conditions" that Robinson writes in her "Explanatory Note" that "calibrate individuals or places, make them vulnerable to the heightened perception, which is hauntedness"? (p. 3)

Robinson's hybrid book—a blend of poetry, essay passages, personal narrative, quotations from writers manifesting the ghostly and a descriptive cataloging of murky photographs—proceeds—as she tells us—circuitously—and meditates less on what ghosts are, than how they “infest” (Robinson's word) us metaphorically. An image of a building's support beams once infested with termites—then painted over—initiates the book: how are we like these “porous” beams, and so, vulnerable to being haunted? How are we broken?

- 2) That I listen to Schubert, that poverty-stricken musician—the Romantic hero who went to an early grave—was it typhoid or was it syphilis?—as I read *On Ghosts* might be another condition of my hauntedness.

After Robinson discloses a personal narrative involving her self-effacing grandmother (now deceased), she vividly shows us how the “ghostly” presences in us. In the passage “Aftermath,” she writes, “That to be alive is in so many ways is to be haunted anyway, to be coursed through with hesitations”(p. 24).

Hesitations define the book. Robinson's prose style: the insistence on the declarative combined with her technique of stopping and starting, her tendency to erase what came before, or to merely adumbrate a thought or an image gives the book its peculiar power. In "*Incident One*," a particularly tragic and beautiful prose poem, she writes: "Over and over the loop of his life rubs on its seam until the stitches rough up his skin and the garment comes apart. Dual ravel" (p. 13).

- 3) That I am beginning to regret my ticket to ride the "Terror Train" later this evening while reading *On Ghosts* also heightens my perception.

Most admirable are Robinson's statements that ring like flashpoints: her narrative style may seem random, plain even. However, as the prose piece "The Nature of Association" unwinds, for instance, we may think we are left with a sketchy description of the narrator's preoccupation with a pore on her shoulder. The piece concludes: "I hope you understand this and its relation to haunting. Embodiment always troubles us, but here you have no clearer example of its effect" (p. 48).

- 4) That the gloom crawls in and around the leaves of all the trees as far as I can see out my window, so that leaf and tone become indistinct while reading *On Ghosts* further "infests" my reading.

We begin to expect, in addition to an accumulation of "Incidents"—narratives in which the speaker reveals her own specific haunting—the attendant accumulation of word photographs; some are related to what she has encountered, others not. Not coincidentally, these are practically non-descriptions in that they trace what isn't there,

...it is hard to see anything of significance in this photo. Note however the ghost's baby tooth crumbling in a dish on the kitchen counter (foreground) and further back in the room, the boom box that went on at random times, always when there was a Harry Potter story tape in it. (From "Photograph #1," p. 15)

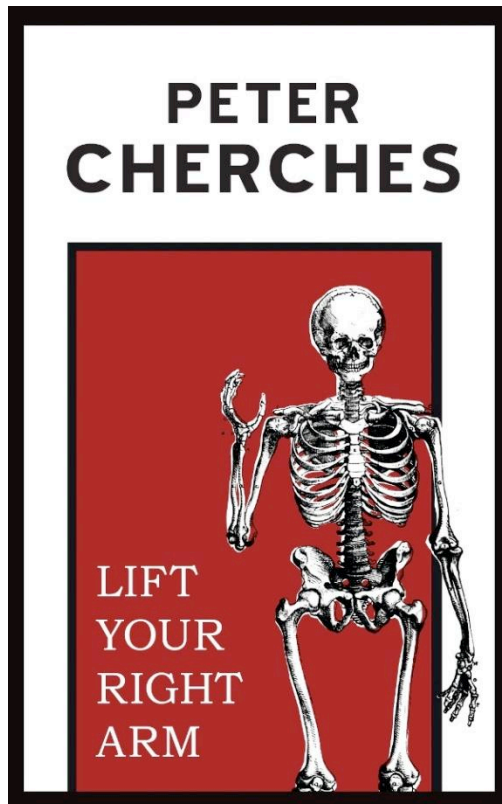
By resisting description, we are left not-seeing the little we may have seen.

The nature of ghosts, their incessancy, the way they activate...

- 5) That the screen freezes and the cursor will not move when I type the words above, so that I hastily handwrite what I've already written, then CTRL-ALT-DEL and recover my document with all but this last half-thought while writing about *On Ghosts* seriously spooks me.

Nonetheless, or perhaps moretheless, *On Ghosts*, once read, redirects the reader to attend to presences of all kinds. Once haunted, Robinson warns us at the outset: "There's now a little alleyway, between the self and the not-self... The new not-selfness is exquisitely sensitive to presence but its own absence has been thrown into the realm of the nonlinguistic" ("Explanatory Note," p. 5). Hence, the not-I has been moved to a wondrous silence.

Michael Kasper Reviews *Lift Your Right Arm* by Peter Cherches



Lift Your Right Arm
Peter Cherches
Pelekinesis, 2013

Peter Cherches has been writing short-prose since before cute phrases like “Flash Fiction” or “Short Shorts” were coined to characterize the genre. His first books came out in the early 1980’s, from notable downtown New York presses like Red Dust and Benzene. Back then, in addition to publishing his pieces widely in both mainstream and alternative magazines, Cherches performed at punk venues with experimental musician Elliott Sharp as the duet *Sonorexia*, he edited an underground art and literary journal, *Zone*, and he collaborated with letterpress wizards Purgatory Pie Press on a couple of wonderful artist’s books.

His published work has always had a strong element of performance, sometimes explicitly, in dialogues and trialogues, otherwise implicitly, in monologuish rants. The work has also always been readable, humorous, minimal (more in the manner of Sixties art than Carver), thought-provoking, and too little known.

The collection *Lift Your Right Arm*, from a new and adventurous publisher, includes five sequences of short-prose by Cherches, some from decades past, some recent. First is ‘Mr. Deadman,’ vignettes about an alter-ego whose life, so to speak, seems to revolve around morbid

wordplay (“Life, Mr. Deadman says, is a death-defying stunt,” reads one page in its entirety), though the puns et al embroider seriously existential fables, a little like Russell Edson’s or Marvin Cohen’s. The second sequence, ‘Bagatelles,’ originally appeared as a chapbook in 1981 and was reprinted in Cherches’ classic *Condensed Book* (1986); in 2004, Billy Collins selected its brilliant opening piece, “Lift Your Right Arm,” for his *Poetry 180* project at the Library of Congress. The writing’s deceptively simple -- and still fresh -- throughout this batch of playfully-presented conversations, which explore couple relationships in hilarious, ambiguous, and sometimes profound ways. Part three, ‘Dirty Windows,’ also about a relationship, starts like a novel in short-prose, its complete first ‘chapter’ being: “They met at a bookstore. She was thumbing through Finnegans Wake when he came by and said, ‘Nice weather.’ She liked that, so when he asked her to join him for a cup of coffee she agreed. They started talking and he learned that she was a meteorologist.” Thereafter, 24 further verbal snapshots build into a portrait of a bickering (but funny) couple, until, true to Cherches’ devotion to formal experimentation, the ‘novel’ just peters out (so to speak). While both plot and character play parts in Cherches’ constructions, neither is taken too seriously. The fourth section, ‘Trio Bagatelles,’ consists of playlets exploring group dynamics, witty and typically philosophical, and in part five, ‘A Certain Clarence,’ (nods to Michaux and Cortázar), the lead character ruminates on the odd assortment of metaphysical situations in which he finds himself.

Cherches is an experienced, self-aware writer with a great ear for colloquialisms and an ever-restless, clever way with literary structure. His work does what good literature should: it makes readers rethink their circumstances. What’s more, it does so in a really entertaining way. *Lift Your Right Arm* is an excellent introduction to his stuff, easily worth twice its modest price.

Submittable

Submissions made simple

Submittable is the best way to accept and review digital content and files.

- *Receive and manage all types of digital content: editorial, contest entries, business plans, portfolios, applications*
- *Earn revenue by accepting payment with submissions*
 - *Store files over time with no hosting costs*

“It blew our minds. All of our submissions flowed through that tool. We could assign them to people for review and editing.”

–The Atlantic

“Submittable is tremendous” –McSweeney’s Books & Magazine

“Very agile and easy-to-use” –Good Magazine

5,600 Organizations and publishers using Submittable

6+ Million Files submitted and curated since 2010

\$100,000 Average new revenue sent to our clients
per month

23 Countries Organizations in **23 countries**, receiving files from over 100

Making Music from the Badlands of Horror Vacui: Virginia Konchan Reviews **Joshua Marie Wilkinson's** *Swamp Isthmus*



Swamp Isthmus
Joshua Marie Wilkinson

Swamp Isthmus
Joshua Marie Wilkinson
Black Ocean, 2013

After every war
someone has to clean up . . .

Photogenic it's not,
and takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.

—Wisława Szymborska, “The End and the Beginning”

What is a republic, without civil and linguistic subjects? Or, perhaps more to the point of Joshua Marie Wilkinson's *Swamp Isthmus*, his sixth full-length collection, what is a country's land (or occupied territories), if indebted, purchased on lien, or inhabited, yet with blood in the (pay dirt) soil? The darker side of the economic and ecological history of America in the 20th century results in poems that, here, do the work of marking time, and space (on the land, and the page) in a way that history has not, or has, but the documents have been shredded, burned, or lost. Along with other poet-legislators tasked with the work of narrating history, naming traumas and enemy camps, and reconstructing, line by line, a sustainable (legible) future such as Noelle Kocot, Juliana Spahr, and Claudia Rankine, Wilkinson is one of documentary (and erasure) poetics'

foremost pioneers, scripting postmodern cartographic texts occupied with the burden, and joy, post-war, of sifting through psychic curios and actual remains in search of lyric presence:

lumbering up
limberlost
to map in
lines of so-called
becoming

Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, and other narrators of America's darker imaginary (the anti-triumphalist legacy of genocide, imperialism and slavery), have, in more recent years, been reinterpreted in hauntologies such as Susan Howe's, exploring the work of naming (and repossessing, through language's legal tender), one's origins and land, not through complete sentences, prose, or epiphanic sentiment but a poetics mimetic of what Wilkinson calls the "cordial disappearances" of nature, meaning, and mind.

The poems, in the form of unpunctuated, elliptical couplets, seethe with pathos ("a garish/fucked out light"; "shaking fits again"; "his music switches up/with a whipping"), attempt spatial and semantic marking in lieu of the very "grid" that post-expressionist formalist painters such as Mondrian or Agnes Martin perceived to undergird two-dimensional space. In contemporary politics, the bottom line is, of course, who owns the actual grids, whether of electrical power, or cyber networks: the terror of this collection is not so much living in fear of the plug being pulled, or keystroke, by the world's ego-scripser ("thieves in the clearing/ enlisting radios// as phones/ as nets// so it works us/ lung-like") pressed, but that it already has, and we are living in the unnamed, unmarked detritus of post- spacetime (amid what the poet calls "gravestones without number// numbers without name"). In a surveillance state, too, we are both monitored ("what you can't hear/ is what's watching you") as well as dependent upon the other to "write us" (hail us as subjects, according to Louis Athusser) down.

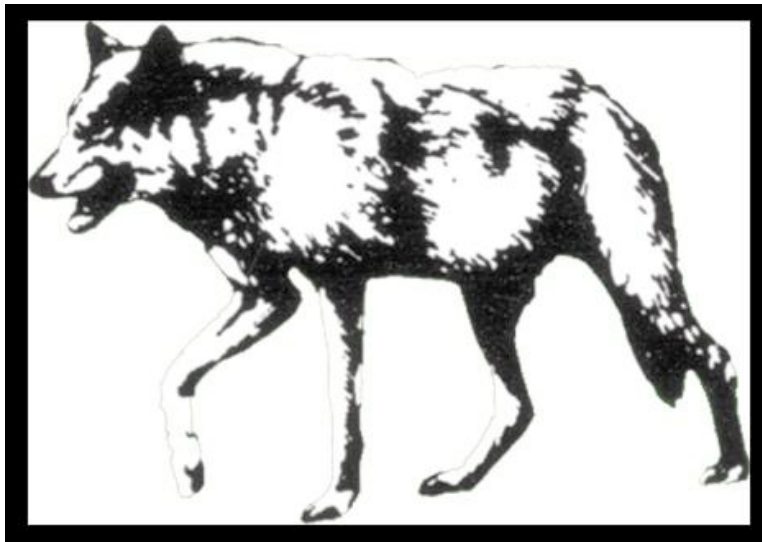
Musically, the effect of Wilkinson's formal choices compels the reader to "hear" internally the caesurae of each line as unmarked on the page and confront the lines (metonymic of the lyric project itself) as isolated units of sense. Readers are as well compelled in conversation with the other line in the couplet, and the winding, paratactic logic of, not the sentence, but the (lacking terminal punctuation, and unimpeded by colons or dashes) poem.

The beauty of this collection, formally and thematically, is the brio Wilkinson brings to the task of making sense out of, and in, form, choosing to see the work of "scanning notes" (cryptography) and reconstruction ("rebuild[ing] the slashed meadows") as an exploratory adventure of creation ("rhythms," as the poets says, "are this way known") rather than a malediction. Indeed, the physics of subject-subject or subject-object relations (reality as co-constituted instantaneously): the moment when what Louise Gluck calls "the perceived became the remembered./the remembered, the perceived," is at the heart of fiber optics, quantum physics, and the lyric. Here, Wilkinson's *rapprochement* and penetration, through language, of the boundary lines of the unspeakable (the ultimate taboo or transgression) is what makes form possible:

what we are
forbidden from

startles the fence
closer

This poet couldn't be more fit for the journey. Wilkinson has written extensively on, and in conversation with, visual art (Egon Schiele) and film. He is deeply conscious that poetic utterance was traditionally an intentioned act (lyric address purposed for another, as an act of fraternity, call and response, *cri de coeur*). His nods to John Keats, and other invented and historic personae (Max Roach, Edgar Huntly) signal the act of communication, however broken or covert, as central to the journey away from the illimitable (and therefore unintelligible) chaos of an unlettered republic ("a hamlet of/ unschooled truants"), NAFTA rhetoric (requiring Canada, Mexico and the US to remove their protective import taxes), an unregulated free market, and the recursive "failures" of post-conceptualism back toward the welcomed bounds—and chosen bonds—of aesthetic form, what Derrida termed "the politics of friendship," spatial geography, and finitude (the vexing conundrum of being, in time).

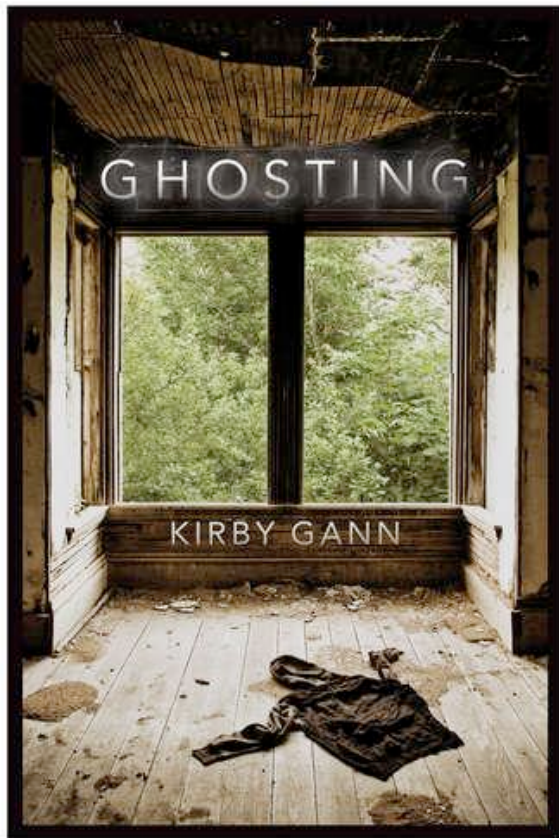


Bottom Dog Press/ Bird Dog Publishing -- 27 Years

<http://smithdocs.net>

Working Lives--Harmony--Memoir--Appalachian Writing--
Laughing Buddha Series

Parth Vasa Reviews Kirby Gann's novel *Ghosting*



Ghosting
Kirby Gann
Ig Publishing, 2012

In Kirby Gann's *Ghosting* rural Kentucky is a place red-hot with life; hellish in some ways, mundane in others. The beauty of the country side comes through along with the dangers lurking from it. Towards the middle of the story he describes a limestone quarry at night patrolled by drug dealers with shotguns. He describes the high quarry walls "blotting out the moon". The same quarry, later in the novel, comes up as peaceful puddle of deep green water where the town's well-to-do go to learn scuba diving and talk about island vacation. Set in Kentucky, it's nominally a story of naïve young man caught up in a life of crime due to familial obligations. The plot only serves as a thin frame around which the author can weave details about a host of characters and the place they inhabit.

The central character is James Cole Prather, a twenty-three-year-old man who works a menial job and has dreams of becoming a scuba diver. His half-brother, Fleece, a rising star amongst the local drug runners has gone missing with a huge shipment of drugs belonging to the dying kingpin Lawrence Greuel. The story revolves around James Cole trying to make sense of Fleece's disappearance while dealing with his drug addled mother, Greuel and his partners.

The best conceived character of the books is Lawrence Greuel. Mister Greuel, as he likes to be called, is equal parts an archetype and an invention. He has ruled the local drug business for decades and now is on his deathbed. The novel is at its richest and most enjoyable when it centers on him. He is a bad man who has done bad things but he is very human. He fondly remembers his dead wife, gets happy at the sight of a beautiful woman, loves his horses, and worries about his son. He is angry that Fleece stole from him not just because he lost a big shipment of drugs but also because he loved Fleece; like a “son that I deserved.” At times his outbursts may remind you of *John Huston* in *Chinatown*, at times of the Hemingway hero in *Snows of Kilimanjaro*, waiting to die and playing back memories. Other characters are, for most parts, well written even though they never become as alive as Mister Greuel. His longtime partner in crime, Arley “Blue” Noe is a cold calculative businessman whose business happens to be running drugs. To emphasize his coolness Kirby Gann even gives him a rare skin disease that makes his skin have a bluish tint.

On the prey side of the equation there is central character of James Cole Prather and his mother Lyda. He is the archetypal weaker sibling who has to push hard to live up to his flamboyant older brother. He has a bum leg and a good heart. He works hard through the book but his character never takes off. You expect that you would want to root for him but the character is too naïve, too weak to really feel hopeful for. Perhaps it is a more realistic portrayal but as a reader I kept feeling disappointed.

James Cole’s mother Lyda is a beautiful woman who has spent most of her adult life in a drug haze. She has moments of clarity and bursts energy like burning magnesium followed by hours of happy drug fuelled illusion. When she thinks or talks, you can see that floating feeling coming through. Their family has a dark history as families like theirs do in stories like this.

What differentiates this novel from other books set in similar circumstances, such as novels by Daniel Woodrel or Donald Ray Pollack is Kirby Gann’s prose. His characters perceive the world in a lush language like a rich soup of images, smells and feelings. For example, this paragraph when James Cole is getting high on some stolen weed,

This shit is fancy good, isn’t it,” he says, and Cole feels the intense and familiar waves roll through his skull and down his neck and over his shoulders, seeping slowly the length of his spine; briefly he envisions a precise image of his nervous system singing with the drug before the rest of his body brightens into a happy and welcome softness. He nods, slowly, and it is all he feels capable of doing, and the doing seems to require an extraordinary amount of effort.

or this opening paragraph,

Three shadows steal across a field of forgotten seed corn, stumbling over fallen husks rotted to the ground — three shadows bent low scurry past rough leaves that scrape the skin like cow tongues. Late November, deep night. Missing rain that once hung like fog sharpens into pin needles on great gusts of wind. The loamy mud sucks at their ankles, white breath blooms before their faces, and their bare arms burn with the cold as they surge over the sodden field, wild with trespass.

In small doses it’s perfect, but there is a lot of it and after a while it drags you down.

At times, the characters sound and feel very different inside their minds than they do outside. Inside, they are more articulate and clear-eyed than they are when they actually talk or act. Like this paragraph that happens during an escape attempt by Cole Prather. He is frazzled, has recently been in a knife fight and is on the edge from some serious uppers. He then looks at the moon,

He cranes forward to get another look at the moon. It's strange — all night he thought of the moon as following him, eyeing his every move, a spotlight he could not escape. It floats lower now, yet still bright enough to blot out the stars. The face of it remains blank and brilliant. As though the night is solid, total, except for this one clean hole bored through its armor and revealing what lies behind : radiant, golden, perfect light.

This insistence by the author of describing character's thoughts in articulate prose becomes both the strong and the weak aspect of the book. It lets us feel the story instead of just being told. But it also slows it down to a point of concern. There are parts of the book when it's hard to put down. The story goes from being a character piece to a matter of fact telling of brutal deeds. Yet this is not a book you run through in an all-nighter. It needs, and deserves, a slower reading.



Brooklyn Arts Press

www.BrooklynArtsPress.com

The new name in Poetry.
Art. Fiction. Nonfiction.
Hybrid. Cats. Hybrid cats.



The first 50 print edition pre-orders of **Julia Cohen's** new book receive a special postcard from the author. Order your copy today!

Collateral Light poems
Julia Cohen

Summer Sale
2 Chapbooks for \$15

Mark Rothko's paintings have the aura of the sacred, the immanence of a revelation, the promise of a secret that is always just about to be disclosed. Martin Rock responds to Rothko's hushed eloquence with his own quick-hitting intimations of mortality, spiritual poems that deftly enter Rothko's visionary space, his intimate, anguished, violent, and fateful dramas.
— Edward Hirsch

Michelle Gil Montero's poems are resonantly visionary, making visible the delicate stitches that attach houses, bodies, words. The precise notations within the vastness of experience create an attention so exquisite, each minute shift resounds, calling to mind H.D.'s "intricate songs' lost measure." This is a book of exceptional insight and immediacy.
— Denise Newman

JONATHAN ALLEN

ANSELM BERRIGAN

Limited first edition of 250 copies.
82 color pages.
\$35.
The art of Jonathan Allen.
The poems of Anselm Berrigan.

David Appelbaum on **Bill Yarrow's** *Pointed Sentences*



Pointed Sentences
Bill Yarrow
BlazeVOX, 2012

Much can be said about a book with such an apt title. Let me try not to overdo it. *Pointed*, as Doctor Johnson's eighteenth century epigram for the book has it, as in sharpened for conciseness. Then there is *pointed* as what mortaring requires, needing repairs. *Pointed*, as an arrow for ease of passage. *Pointed*, as in an ostensive definition, indicating location. *Pointed*, as in a critical remark. *Pointed*, as the number of points scored. *Pointed*, as coming to an apex. There is also a diversity surrounding *sentences*, for example, the syntactically well-formed variety, the terms of punishment, or (with a stretch) pertaining to sentience.

Bill Yarrow has put together a book of sentences of the literary kind, reminding us early of the downside, that 'not enough of us/ destroy/ what we create.' ['Blossoms and Buds'] Sentences are like that, haphazard existents, assembled by the dice roll of Heraclitus's child. They depend on something that may or may not be furnished. They are tricky and demanding, not always coming clean, holding back, telling without showing, up to something (no good?)—often losing the poet as they point elsewhere than to his intentions: 'I say/ something and I fall through my words'. ['Startle Reflex'] This is less than free fall, more like Alice's fall into the pool of treacle at the bottom of the rabbit hole, and it turns the poet's grasp for 'accuracy' into its other, e.g., 'What's left/ of salvation is covered in gelatin./ There's a buttered emptiness awaiting us.' ['Pain']

Can sentences, even if pointed, say what they mean? They need to, if sentences and the work are to get pointed in the direction of meaning. There is trouble here for the pointer, Yarrow indicates, since 'Water, the glue of contingent necessity' flows where it wishes, not where the poet would have it. ['Clinch Park'] No matter what poetry wants from its words (and sentencings), mostly here are the misses, mishaps, and errancy to recap—though hope always abounds for the to-come: 'up head, there's a signpost;/ down below, this rich ricochet of loss.' ['The Rest Nowhere'] If the poet were able to keep this lability of the language in mind, perhaps the difficulty could be contained or outflanked. But Yarrow confesses a new uncertainty: 'I know what needed/ to be done but I forgot I knew.' ['The Cave'] Not only the weakness of the

logos (words failing to point properly) and now a weak memory, or perhaps some force of repression, adds to the burden.

The intrinsic sloppiness of signification lies at the base of Yarrow's stunning narratives, these slices of life, personal history, observation, and speculation. Words are always there. They speak miles. But to what do they point? —Perhaps a surface, resplendent with color and design, with nothing below. At one point, the poet asks, 'Why was it so difficult to move/ toward anything?' ['Self Alaska'] Yes, movement is accomplished with ease, but where does it all go? Perhaps it is like 'the crab about to scamper/ from the net'—the sentences just want to get out. ['Bees in the Eaves'] Outside, however, promises no liberation. It is dark where we write and most things are redundant. Yarrow asks rhetorically, 'Why go outside where it is benighted and melanomic?' ['Why Go Outside?'] Outside, where all cows are black, one realizes the truth of the work, that the sentences point nowhere. A vital axis of coordinates has been removed. It never was there.

Yarrow comes close to remembering this. He tells us, 'Acts have no meaning, but they do have/ trajectory.' ['Black Ice on the Bridge'] But how and what kind? Trajectory leads from somewhere to somewhere, it points, it arrives at a place, maybe where it began. The work here, for all its unhesitant movement, is more enigmatic. The lovely (and loving) particulars dance and sing, with spirit (sometimes to God), and where they end up is in a different time, with another logic (or its absence.) I'm not sure whether the other time (or, other than time) is announced by the guru of 'Low Dose Yoga':

'We are,' he says
'the book the future
wants us to read'

or whether this is far too utopian (an opiate), and the book is rather where 'There's no daylight in the life to/ come when the darkness is not medicinal.' ['Searching For the Word']

Pointed Sentences could go either way.

Ghosts of Ocelots

Coming soon from Ampersand Books
www.ampersand-books.com
The Greatest Literary Project of All Time

Ghosts of Ocelots

Life in The Republic, a nation at once timeless and impossible, is a man lying in a road waiting to die, a scholar and a former death squad commander meeting at the crest of a high-rise office building, students disappearing into unmarked vans, and buses flying from cliffs. These seven stories bear the brand of a place that seems to operate according to its own laws of space and time, so different from the physics of our own world that simply to go there is to risk getting hopelessly lost, without a map to show the way out.

"The stories of Ghosts of Ocelots are to be read for their layered richness of language and sensibilities... One is enveloped by the lushness of language and detail. The landscapes, city-scapes of poverty-and-violence-stricken Guatemala, and the persons that move in them, are drawn with an impressionist brush that provides the reader with a vivid feel for them. The narrator's feeling for the people is clear – for their suffering, their sense of entrapment in hopeless poverty and squalor and a system of violence and genocide." – Rafael Jesús Gonzalez, author of *El Hacedor de Juegos/The Maker of Games*.

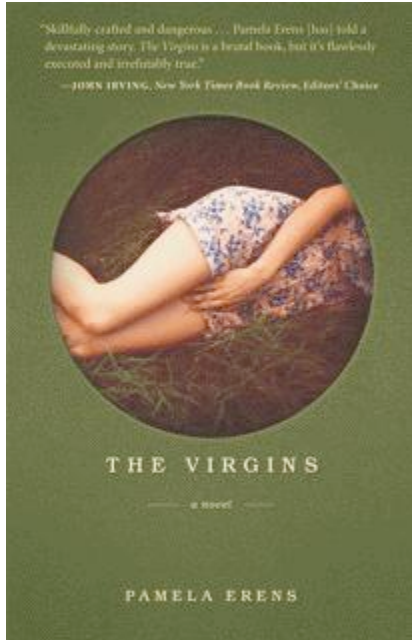
Diddy Wah Diddy

"Diddy-wah-Diddy is an outlaw work, riffing connections faster than the eye can follow or the mind can see, a narrative shapeshifter at work and play, coming off like some literary Coltrane, dancing through waves of cascading metaphors and narrative riffs, voices and visions, startling conjunctions and intuitive revelations. Literature doing what it does best, forging a new way of seeing - a profound meditation on the human condition wrapped in a wild blue jazz solo. With Diddy-wah-Diddy, Corey Mesler's unique voice has found its fruition in a narrative tour de force. Him and his work both stone cold literary outlaws. Memphis on the cutting edge. Representing." – Arthur Flowers, author of *Another Good Loving Blues* and *De Mojo Blues*

"They say—they used to say—that anything can happen on Beale Street. Here it does." – Greil Marcus, author of *Lipstick Traces* and *Mystery Train: Images of American in Rock and Roll Music*

Ampersand Books
www.ampersand-books.com

Ed Davis Reviews the novel *The Virgins* by Pamela Erens



The Virgins
Pamela Erens
Tin House Books, 2013

Remember that couple at your high school or college who were always making out in public, who became notorious, perhaps envied, then eventually reviled, for “doing it” a lot more than anyone else? But were they? Or was the truth a lot more complicated than it appeared on the surface? Pamela Erens’ novel *The Virgins* (Tin House Books, 2013) is impressive for many reasons—strong narrative writing, suspenseful plotting and fully human characters—but perhaps the best thing about it is her incredible knowledge of sex from the point of view of both genders. I regret this novel was not available to me when I was sixteen; however, it’s never too late to figure out what was truly happening at one of life’s most critical junctures.

The Golden Couple at the center of *The Virgins* have plenty of sexual difficulty, to which all readers will painfully relate. Aviva Rossner, away at boarding school, is newly bold. At her old school she was practically invisible but no more; she’s developed style in order to make a place in the world for herself in order to compete with her superstar professor mother (an unforgettable minor character). And Aviva meets her perfect complement in the athletic, Korean-American Seung Jung. Together, they manifest extreme sexual heat, looking all but naked as they make out for hours all over campus (and, eventually, in a hotel stairway in New York City).

So maybe you’re thinking: another clichéd coming-of-age story set at a boarding school of the late seventies: just another thinly-disguised autobiographical love triangle? We might think so

for a few pages until the narrator—horny, entitled Bruce Bennett-Jones—driven a little crazy by the sexy Aviva, sexually assaults her, shocking himself before the feisty victim defends herself very well. Afterward, Bruce knows he'll never have another chance for a real relationship with Aviva, so when the good-looking but otherwise average-in-every way Seung takes up with her, Bruce is relegated to watching, and that's when things get *really* interesting. He's beyond voyeurism, for, while he witnesses as much of the Golden Couple's behavior as anyone else on the small campus, he can't know the intimate details of their sex life together—so he invents what he can't know. Thus, it's through the imagination rather than senses of this highly-articulate “theater guy,” now much older and looking back, that we receive the public and private details of the couple's relationship (which he tells us early on, ends in tragedy).

The analysis of sex and power afforded by this point of view is highly effective. Bruce is the perfect vehicle to dissect the dynamics of Seung and Aviva's sexual relationship with almost-clinical precision—and in the process completely reveal the dysfunction of these two doomed young lovers. Who among us, male or female, doesn't remember what it was like to yearn to lose one's virginity, only to find the experience far from romantic, and ourselves far from competent? And that's the gist of it: these lovers, for all their steam and apparent affection, if not love for each other, lack the ability to consummate, although everyone on campus assumes otherwise.

It's painful—yet instructive and enlightening—to observe this volatile relationship, along with Bruce. As he says before we're fifty pages into the novel, teen sex is much more about “metaphysical yearnings” than it is about “asses and crotches . . .” We beginners experienced sex as psyche more than body, as vulnerability and power, exposure and flight, being anointed, saved, transfigured. To . . . *do it wrong* was to experience . . . the death of one's ideal soul.” That could easily stand as the book's thesis, letting the readers know what's at stake. Erens delivers on her implied promise to probe the sexual psyche, and the events she dramatizes are never merely prurient, coarse or clichéd. Her many revelations and insights ring sadly true.

To illustrate with one of Bruce's fairly minor—but spot on—insights about kissing and talking: “. . . a tongue pushing deep inside you *was* as fucked as you could possibly be . . .” and maybe even “more than anything that came later.” As for the talking that comes after: “Without it they would turn on each other, not be able to stand the pleasure.” Such statements, offered by the mature Bruce, help us understand a ritual as old as time itself, but made so much more complicated by today's crazy age—and worse than complicated, *dangerous*. Knowing the Golden Couple is doomed does not lessen the suspense at all, for the tragic conclusion is as surprising as it is inevitable. Another great satisfaction is that Erens doesn't rush this story with so much at stake but gives herself ample time to develop the denouement following the sad climax.

The Virgins will surely fascinate and interest all lovers of literary fiction—but writers especially will be interested to see how she pulls off this difficult point of view challenge. If we hate the narrator, the book doesn't work nearly as well: we'll ignore any wisdom Bruce finds in looking back at his and the other characters' horrific mistakes. Readers could be forgiven for wondering whether Bruce is merely the author's mouthpiece, speculating ad nauseum about the couple with whom he's obsessed. However, he plays an active role in the events leading to the tragedy. Significantly, I found the would-be rapist more sympathetic than not, willing to admit mistakes

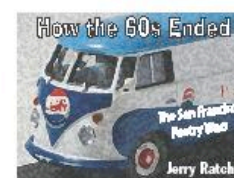
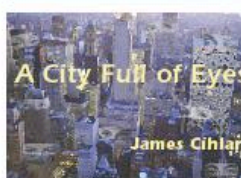
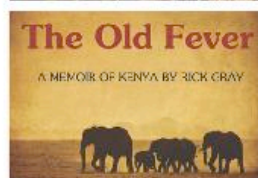
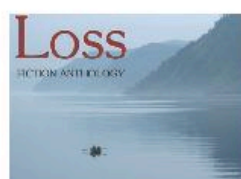
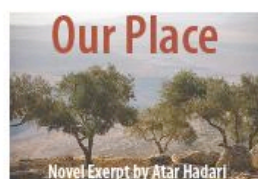
and shortcomings, accept the consequences and even regret them, recognizing himself as “someone filled with ugly and perhaps uncontrollable impulses.” It’s clear the grown-up Bruce would’ve behaved much differently if he’d had access to any of the hard-won wisdom he possesses now. Others might have a lot more trouble than I did forgiving his worst shortcomings.

I can’t recall a recent novel in which I was so thoroughly engaged as *The Virgins*. The fictionist in me argued with the narrator when he says that telling someone’s story “is at one and the same time an act of devotion and an expression of sadism. You are the one moving bodies around, putting words in their mouths, making them do what you need them to do. You insist, they submit.” I agree completely with devotion but . . . sadism? The people in my stories mostly tell and show me what they want to do. They mostly insist; I mostly submit—and I wouldn’t have it any other way. I suspect that, regardless of what her character thinks, Pamela Erens wouldn’t, either.

Wordrunner
echapbooks 
www.echapbook.com

STAY WELL-READ (for free!)

Wordrunner eChapbooks* publishes four online collections annually of fiction, poetry and memoir, each featuring one or two authors, and the occasional anthology. We invite you to browse our archive at www.echapbook.com. The writing is insightful, engaging, surprising and diverse, and it’s available at no cost.



*What are chapbooks? A few hundred years ago they were cheaply produced pamphlets hawked in the streets for pennies. The 21st century equivalent is any Web publication. The Internet is the street. Our echapbooks, each uniquely designed, are easy to read and navigate on screen and enriched with hyperlinks. They are also available as downloadable pdfs.

There is no fee to submit. Authors are paid.

Robin Martin Reviews **Bonnie ZoBell's** short stories in *The Whack Job Girls*



The Whack Job Girls & Other Stories
Bonnie ZoBell
Monkey Puzzle Press, 2012

Humans are curious and strange. We attach to unnaturally bred teacup dogs, watch television that dramatizes the most heinous human acts, invent stories about strangers' lives, dig our heels in stubbornly over things fathomable only to ourselves, tolerate a status quo that keeps us depressed and trapped, and keep up appearances that are unflattering at best. In *The Whack Job Girls & Other Stories* (Monkey Puzzle Press), Bonnie ZoBell's collection of short short stories, the language and choice details reveal a dangerous undercurrent of laziness and self-loathing in today's America. Not that it feels like it is delivering some judgment from on high, because it doesn't do that. ZoBell's characters are a function of point of view, the stories minimal lyricized sketches.

For the most part, the characters serve more to create mood than to be round characters, with perhaps one notable exception: The collection has a powerful opener in "Nonnie Wore No Clothes," weaving mental illness and family dysfunction and religion and adolescent angst and creating stunning images and characters, two of them, that the reader really fears for and cares about. So much empathy can be generated by her choice of detail and precise language. The piece can be held up as an example of what attention to language can produce. The first two

lines: “Nonnie sat cross-legged in front of the living room wall wearing no clothes. On the drywall before her were two brown spots looking back,” and the writer’s superb use of the limited third person perspective of Nonnie, where “Anyone could see this was the Madonna,” establish everything for the reader with an economy of language. The verb choices are equally controlled and exact in this piece: “Her son Antonio banged into the house.” The conflict is established quickly and forcefully: “You can’t keep doing this shit or they’re not going to let me live with you anymore.” The reader is afraid for Nonnie, who has cracked up, and afraid for her son, admiring his patience, his maturity, his self-restraint, and sad for this boy who has to behave like the adult in order to get the house ready for the county worker’s inspection. The piece never crosses into magical realism, the reader is never inclined to believe that a tearful Virgin Mary really has made an appearance in the drywall. The piece ends not quite hopefully, despite the fact that Nonnie shows signs of change.

The title piece, “The Whack-Job Girls,” is set in Nellie’s Hair Salon, where small town women have started (sort of) challenging the backward-ass misogyny in their lives and live vicariously through the one single woman, Kitty. This piece is funny; intentionally funny- it features lyrics to a supposed song by Loretta Lynn (it couldn’t be a real song by this artist, although her lyrics are almost as absurd). And has a romantic twist (I guess you can call it that) at the end. This is completely absurdist and some of the lines are very funny: When the women insist that the postmaster stop opening mail not addressed to him, he threatens to have them arrested. “What could the women do? If the FBI drove over, who’d fix the kids’ meals and get them to school? Who’d be the only one in the house who could find the hemorrhoid lotion?” The men are truly assholes in this story, and the women are pretty much dumb bimbos. It’s not a flattering portrait of anyone, and a sensitive small town type might believe the author is making fun of those who occupy said small towns.

Towards the end of the ten-story collection, the piece called “Serial” opens with a disturbing image from a television dramatization of a murder and pans out to the couple who watches the show from their separate couches. The first person narrator describes the content of the television show, including a preview that reveals that, “a couple involved in torture will be driven to far more heinous acts than either would pursue alone.” The reader gets the sense that this is a comfortable couple, comfortable alone together. The family image is both comforting and a bit off kilter- the astute selection of details serve to darken the piece that outwardly is non-threatening but again the reader is left feeling this sense that a darkness is innately inside all living things, but for a fine veneer, which keeps it at bay. This piece and the first one are the writer’s strongest commentary on the state of humankind and its tenuous position as functioning society.

This is a chapbook, containing just ten flash fiction pieces, each previously published in a variety of magazines, and it comes with a lot of advance praise from the likes of Steve Almond, Myfawny Collins and Kathy Fish. As the title promises, each of the stories features women who are a little unusual; some of the pieces are in first person point of view, others in limited third, and there’s even one piece told in second person. “You are Not Langston Hughes,” is a first person story told in second person, a technique used very successfully by some writers (see Grandbois, *The Arsenic Lobster*) and less successfully by others. As it serves to distance the narrator from the action and attempts to draw the reader in as participant, it remains an odd point

of view despite its recent popularity. This piece manages to be extremely self-aware and somehow about racial discomfort. The City (NYC, of course) is the antagonist in this piece—the city and the narrator’s fear and awkwardness as an outsider. It feels like it might be the most autobiographical of all the stories, just by virtue of its self-consciousness. ZoBell is adept at her craft, and this collection of her stories is engaging.

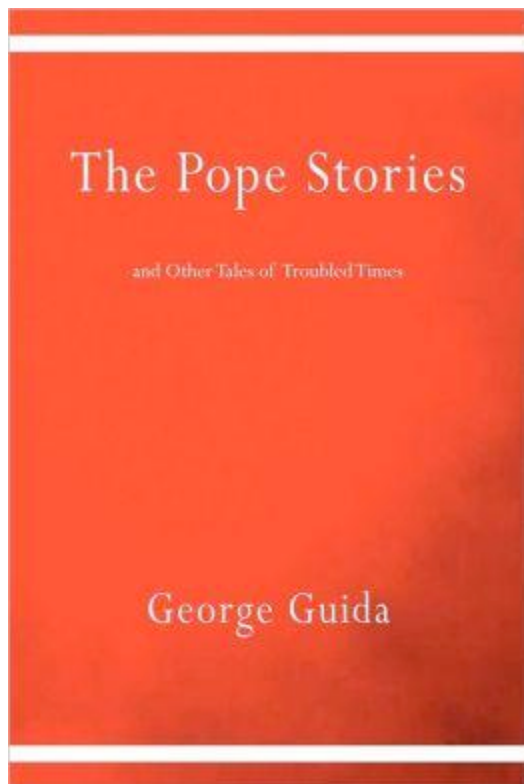


**BEVERLY DAHLEN + JAMIE TOWNSEND + SARAH
MANGOLD + MAIRÉAD BYRNE + JIMMY LO + ROB
MCLENNAN + RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS + DAN THOMAS
GLASS + MAC WELLMAN + TODD MELICKER + JARED
HAYES + MEGAN KAMINSKI + JOE MILAZZO + JULIA
DRESCHER + KEVIN VARRONE + EMILY ABENDROTH
+ LEE GOUGH + EMILY CARR + CAROLINE KNAPP +
STEPHEN NELSON + BROOKLYN COPELAND + ELIZABETH
ROBINSON + BRAD VOGLER + STEVE GILMARTIN**

*We love chapbooks and poets. We love little ones, little known. We love things that fit into
trouser pockets. We love small pages, plush covers, uneven stitches and folds.*


LITTLE RED LEAVES TEXTILE EDITIONS
WWW.TEXTILESERIES.COM

Fred Misurella Reviews **George Guida's** short fictions in *The Pope Stories*



The Pope Stories and Other Tales of Troubled Times
George Guida
Bordighera Press, 2012

Popes, a cop, professors, and the god-like beauty of an angelic baby: these are four icons from Italian American life that George Guida, poetry editor of *2 Bridges Review* and author of two volumes of poems, *Low Italian* and *New York and Other Lovers*, treats in this striking volume of stories. Bereft of Mafia thugs, yet filled with the robust poetry of Brooklyn street talk, the eight stories of this collection carry the reader into the vigorous, everyday life of ordinary Italian Americans grappling with the contrasts and contradictions of old world ways in 20th and 21st century America, where rules, like records, beg to be broken and cultures, like cheeses, melt and mingle into a complex sauce.

In some of the funniest stories I have ever read, Guida satirizes Italian American worship of the Pope, papal glamor, and in a marvelous display of internal narrative thought on the part of His Holiness, the Pope's rock star concern with his image in a world of cameras, terrorists, and changing moral customs. In "Courting the Pope" he marries an Italian American couple on a Florida beach with video cameras as witness, and in "The New Pope" he plans a meeting with Muslims as part of a reluctant attempt at worldly ecumenism: "Sicily, yes, Palermo *se stessa*, the

outskirts, some fine Moorish palace by the sea. White glove service of hors d'oeuvre. How I love the rice balls. They also come without meat, that our Muslim brethren may partake.”

I have heard Guida read some of these stories before Italian American writers and academics and have joined in the raucous laughter. There is a knowing, loving quality in his writing that rings absolutely true despite some of the outlandish situations. In “Killing the Pope” a son wonders how his family would react if he were the killer. His father “would limp to the head of the dining room table, sit blank-faced, and wait for a cup of coffee. My mother would stare at him with his eyes averted to the bay window and front lawn beyond, fixed on the white plaster-of-Paris donkey and cart near the cypress shrubs, until she could no longer bear the silence:

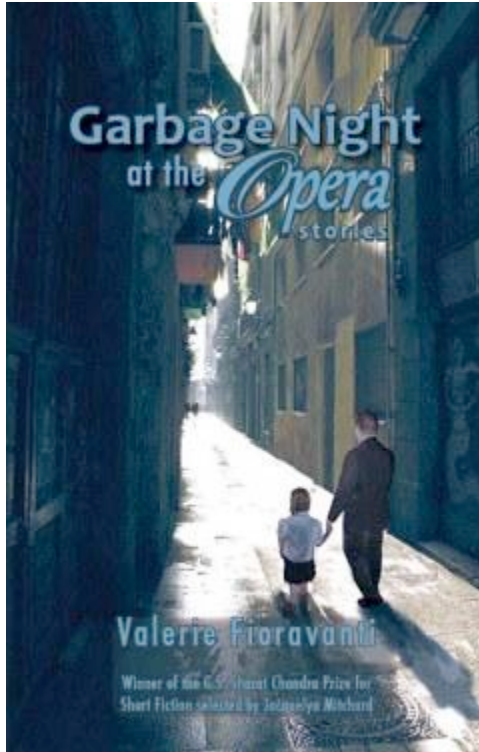
‘Guess what your son did, Pattelli?’

‘That’s right, Dad,’ I’d tell him later on the phone, ‘next thing I knew, there was the Pope lying on the ground. Blood? No, not too much. I’d’ve thought, you know, a lot more, him being a religious icon and all. But what did Mom say about it? No, of course not! It was an accident.’

The sense that in the world outside just about anything is possible contradicts the precise diction, the inter-family locutions, the prescribed behavior, and the unwritten expectations of family members. Guida works those elements into a humorous froth in most of the collection, but in several of the others he demonstrates a greater emotional range, showing Nabokovian invention in “The Imbecile Professor (A Student’s Defense)” and “In Flight”, while remaining just this side of classical tragedy in “Angel Boy” and “Rome”, the latter a story of a New York City cop at Columbia during the student riots of 1968.

“Rome” is particularly memorable, showing masterly authorial range in that Guida writes with realistic sympathy and vivid prose about civil rights violence and police violence as experienced by a single Italian American man. The language of men in battle, the pungent description of that battle, and the unflinching sharpness of the vision of the results of the battle make the story remarkable in ways that showcase Guida’s social and psychological depth. It is a beautiful counterpoint to the daring satiric humor of the four title stories of the book, and I recommend it to readers interested in vital American fiction and multi-cultural literature in general.

Bonnie ZoBell Reviews Valerie Fioravanti's short story collection *Garbage Night at the Opera*



Garbage Night at the Opera
Valerie Fioravanti
BkMk Press, 2012

The seemingly romantic way in which Valerie Fioravanti connects her stellar collection, *Garbage Night at the Opera*, is by placing all of a large Italian family in the same Brooklyn apartment building. Through this ingenious yet natural connection, Fioravanti's characters move out from their families when they're of age and get their own apartments—in the same building. Aunts, cousins, brothers and grandmothers live down the hall or upstairs or downstairs to maintain their own little community. However, as any one of these extended family members can tell you, it ain't all that romantic, and therein lies the conflict and tension of this highly-engaging and beautifully-written book. Just ask Franca or Angela or Rose Anna, especially Lina, or any of the other provocative characters in this award-winning collection if they think it's always a great idea to have family quite that close by. The answer isn't hard to predict.

Family drama and romance abound in this literary collection, but the history of the area is equally interesting. The family doesn't seem to have been in America too long and is stuck in the blue color world of Brooklyn factories. Fighting between the unions and factory owners are going on and the solution, unfortunately, is that the factories shut down one by one rather than having to pay the workers another cent. Brooklyn Box & Paper is the first to go, laying off four

hundred workers at once, five members of extended family in Fioravanti's book. Then there's the catsup factory, the breweries, and so on.

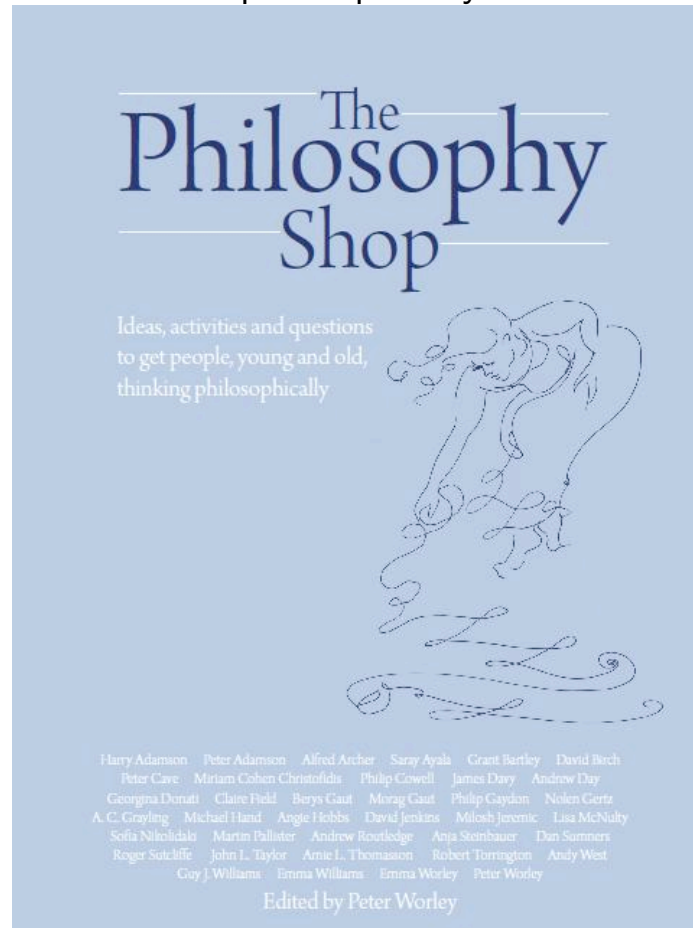
The title story, "Garbage Night at the Opera," is heartbreaking and exquisite. Massimo, the sole parent of Franca after her mother has died, is proud, attends college three nights a week in bookkeeping, and always wants to improve himself and especially his daughter. He's found inexpensive student tickets to take Franca all the way into Manhattan to see *La Bohème*. When she gets home from her grandparents' place, two floors down, he's already ironed her dress for the opera, and when she asks if she can wear a different one instead, he only wants her to be happy. Their journey into the city is one of high-class distinctions, the haves and the have-nots, finding vast treasures on the street when it's garbage night in Manhattan. He can hardly bear for Franca to be hurt as her innocence is awakened during run-ins with Manhattan garbage owners who think they know how to raise his daughter better than he does.

In the poignant "Earning Money All Her Own," Angela has decided on a different career move than the rest of her family. Rather than working in a factory or one of the breweries along the river like the rest of them, she decides she wants something different and takes on the far more elegant job of a switchboard operator at an answering service in Manhattan and commutes. She has four sisters, three younger, one older, but Angela is the only one with a savings account. She gets her hair done professionally, goes out to lunch and movies with her girlfriends, though her sisters "didn't have time for such foolishness." She even walks along streets at night without another woman anywhere near. Here the sisters think she is "too adventurous, and according to them, this was the reason she remained unmarried (as if single men only lived in Greenpoint and Williamsburg)." And yet when one after the other of her brothers and brothers-in-law lose their jobs, mostly at the brewery, and they fall into dark depression because this is all they've ever known, it is Angela who has money to loan them and brings them meals. It is Angela who takes care of them and endures the sad endings that come to some of her family members.

In "Make Your Wedding Perfect," Lina, until now a good Italian girl, is bombarded with wedding advice from some old bridal planner: "The most important decision you make may be your dress. The bridal gown sets the tone for the entire wedding. Choose carefully, brides!" And later: "A bridal shower honors the bride and allows her friends and family to celebrate her good fortune, as is fitting, with attention and gifts. Prepare to be surprised, brides, unless you want to be immortalized in wearing sweatpants and a hat made of bows and ribbon!" Only two stories later in the collection, the reader is shocked to hear what becomes of Lina.

Occasionally one might wish for some more sympathetic male characters. Fathers, sons, brothers, and lovers can be pretty cruel, both emotionally and physically. However, there's the wonderful Massimo in the title story who so lovingly dotes on his daughter. And these are tough times. The men, expected to be the breadwinners, are being torn from jobs they expected to do their whole lives. They're losing their identities as longshoremen, factory workers, beer makers. And therein lies the artistry of this book. The gritty, sticky feel of living by the shore is brought home as if you're living there, too, as is what it would be like for your sisters, mother, daughters, and wife—no matter how much you loved them—to be able to watch every last thing that you do, especially when you're down on your luck. The utter realism and stunning lyrical writing in *Garbage Night at the Opera* makes it a must read.

The Philosophy Shop:
Ideas, activities and questions to get people, young and old, thinking
philosophically



Edited by Peter Worley with contributions from The Philosophy Foundation,
including Peter Cave, Peter Adamson, Anja Steinbauer, A.C.Grayling, Angie
Hobbs and Roger Sutcliffe

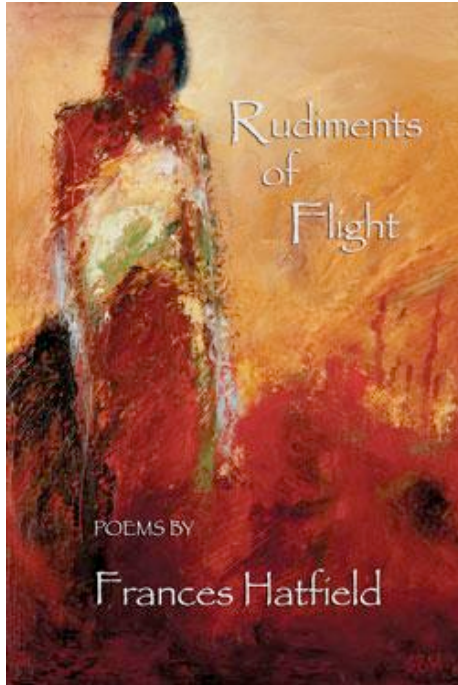
ISBN 9781781350492

\$ 29.95

Available from www.cbsd.com

A veritable emporium of philosophical puzzles and challenges to develop thinking in and out of the classroom. Imagine a one-stop shop stacked to the rafters with everything you could ever want, to enable you to tap into young people's natural curiosity and get them thinking deeply. Well, this is it! Edited by philosophy in schools expert, Peter Worley and with contributions from philosophers from around the world, The Philosophy Shop is jam-packed with ideas to get anyone thinking philosophically. For use in the classroom, at after school clubs, in philosophy departments and philosophy groups or even for the lone reader, this book will appeal to anyone who likes to think. Take it on journeys and dip in; use it as a classroom starter activity, or for a full philosophical enquiry – it could even be used to steer pub, dinner party or family discussions away from the same old topics.

Grace Curtis Reviews **Frances Hatfield's** poetry collection *Rudiments of Flight*



Rudiments of Flight
Frances Hatfield
Wings Press, 2013

Frances Hatfield's debut book of poetry, *Rudiments of Flight*, is a collection of beautifully conceived and thoughtfully crafted poems that offer readers entrance into the interiors of everyday living along beside the murkier, more elusive residences of dreams. Her topics include therapy, marriage, children, women, butterflies, the empty nest. Her images—snakes, frogs, trees, rain, along with a healthy dose of mythological figures.

As I read Hatfield's poems, I found myself drawn more and more into them as I went along. That is not to say, I didn't find the initial poems compelling. I did. I particularly liked the opening poem, "Nude Descending a Staircase" which, to me, describes the book as a whole:

Imagine the scene
where the body plunges
through a plate of glass
in very slow motion,
the invisible wall shatters
into a puzzle of light, the shriek
of splintering shards winds down
to reveal a choral ode
both jubilant
and tragic

and let's say you are the glass
and love the body...

Indeed, as I read these poems and got further into the work, there was a feeling of almost moving in slow motion, like Hatfield, herself, is moving slowly, almost methodically through her concerns. It is a sense of quietude and thoughtfulness that invited me to take a closer look.

In the poem, "Rough Guide to the Underworld," she explores marriage, saying, "It's not just for the dead, it's not heaven or hell, but if you've made it this far, you know that." She strips away one onion skin at a time, in slo-mo, getting to "what it costs to journey here." And the *here*—is it marriage, parenting, illness, cancer? It is all of these things. It is *life* itself.

Now you find you can walk through walls
you once knew simply as "myself,"
and now you remember you could always fly,
except now your body's a vast school of small fish,
and you speak in an alphabet of light and motion.

Hatfield seems to be exploring life's topics in her poems and thereby, espousing exploration in the reader, in the gentlest way possible—softly, and often in those quiet moments when we are most open to it, those times when we dream, or are quietly contemplating the beautiful strangeness of living. And, those times might be when we watch the rain, see a spider, sit in a therapy session, participate in a cancer support group, or even when listening to a child as in "A Prayer Before Bed,"

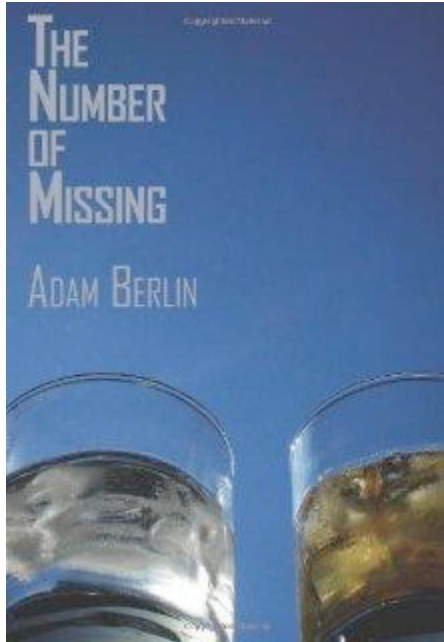
'And who made up the names for things?
Rhinoceros, for instance?
Why isn't it called ubba dubba dubba?'

Then, her poet's heart steering us
thrillingly past all we know, she asks
'And if I want to make up new names,
how can I unthink the names I already know?'

In reading through the poems in this book, I felt Hatfield would give the child of this poem, the reader, and anyone who crosses her path as much latitude as needed should they wish to 'unthink' the names they already know. She has given herself that freedom in her poetry and in doing so she allows her poems to open into a kind of lyrical expansiveness that feels both beautiful and important.

Most of the poems lived up to her obvious high standard of poetics, although every once in a while, (but, not often) I found myself feeling like the poet might have reached deeper to make all the poems, all the lines of all the poems stand on their tiptoes and reach a little higher, just as they do in a majority of the work. Hatfield is at her best in poems like those mentioned already, and poems like, "How to End a War," "Oblation," and others. In fact, any poet would be happy to have such an accomplished first publication that is this read-worthy.

Robin Martin reviews Adam Berlin's novel *The Number of Missing*



The Number of Missing
Adam Berlin
Spuyten Duyvil, 2013

If you've read any of Adam Berlin's very masculinist prose in either his short stories or his earlier novels, *The Number of Missing* will seem familiar. Berlin's protagonist, a wannabe actor who works as a nude artists' model, is a boxer, a jogger, walks with a swagger, drinks too much bourbon, and has sex with a different woman just about every night. The first person narrator in this novel is pretty much a Hemingway man, drinking and fucking insatiably, one individual against his whole environment, which here is post-9/11 Manhattan. David lost his best friend Paul when the towers collapsed:

The plane went straight into the North Tower.

Fireball.

Smoke.

I was running downtown.

I tried to count, head straining forward, breath hard in my chest, running harder than I'd ever run, as if I were being chased, but really the terror was so great it was chasing me, in front of me but forcing me to run, I tried to count down the floors through the smoke, to see if he was in the middle of what had to be an inferno inside but from outside looked like a hole with some fire around it... I was running and trying to count down the floors to Paul's office on the 103rd floor. I was close to the tower but not close enough, not close enough to help him if he could be helped. (10)

Everything is complicated by the nature of his and Paul's last interaction—Paul had found stability in marriage, David was denying any desire for it. The prose, like the narrator, is a bit self indulgent, though very well paced.

The sky's clear, again, another perfect day for cleaning debris. As if God, having not intervened before, has at least made it easy, made some of it easy, after. Sunny days. Wind-less nights. No rain. No

freezing temperatures or snow. The digging continues, ahead of schedule, and each time the news shows Ground Zero it looks more and more like a construction site. Too much of the horror is gone. No fire. No smoke. A homogenized mass grave. It must be the same way at Pearl Harbor. Or Hiroshima. What was war becomes peace, becomes peaceful. But in the coil of my testicles there's an angry residue and in places I can't even name, places inside my throat and behind my chest, I'm sad, and sometimes worse than sad, less than sad, a cavity of empty. (155)

The dialogue drives this novel more than the interior voice. It is in the character's interactions with others, the re-creation of memories of his travels with Paul (including one involving bull fighting!), with Mel, Paul's widow, and with Sandra, the one woman who is around for more than one sodden evening, that David's true insecurities are revealed. He is afraid of forgetting, and he is afraid of being invisible:

'Can you remember them?' she says. 'I mean, can you remember them exactly as they were?'

'Every time I look downtown I see the towers.'

'Every time?' she says.

She's watching me for a lie.

'No,' I say. 'Not every time. You're right. I don't see them every time. I see the towers most of the time but not always. Sometimes I look downtown and for a moment, for a first moment before I remember, it looks like there was never anything there.'

'That's what happens with time.'

'I hate it.'

'Sometimes I hate it,' she says. (216)

At one point, David has agreed to help an obese gastroenterologist get laid. The dinner conversation exposes the misogynistic and narcissistic protagonist, as he turns the conversation back to himself:

'I drink too much. What would happen if I had to stop drinking?'

...

'It depends on how much you drink.'

'I can take it,' I say.

'You're a wall puncher,' he says. 'You like to see how much you can take.'

'Part of me isn't scared at all. Part of me doesn't care.'

I look at my hands. Knuckles skinned. Fingers less swollen. I've slowed a little... but I could start again. Start heavy again. Drink heavy. Like I'm drinking now. Time-skip drinking. Like remembering. Remember heavy instead of pretending everything's okay until it is.

'You'll take what you can take,' he's saying. 'But your body will take over.... Ultimately your body will take over and do what it must.'

'Like jumping.'

'I suppose. Like a lot of things. The brain starts things off and it sends the impulse, but then the body takes over. After a while mind over matter really is just a saying that means nothing. The body wins no matter what anyone says.'

I stand. There's a drink in front of me. I drink it down.

'He took you to dinner.' I'm looking at the women. 'He kept you entertained. He has a room at The Plaza. If you're fair, you'll go back with him. That's your sentence if you want to think of it that way.'

The women don't say anything. But they're listening.

I'm looking at him. 'Thanks for dinner. I'm full.' (233)

The female characters are only characters responding to the men around them; even Mel, the female lead, is responding to Paul's death, responding to "the Arab," responding to the narrator. David for some reason has pledged to "catch Mel" when she falls, but he is sinking deep into a glass of bourbon and wasting away. He is avoiding thinking because too much thinking prevents

doing, and without doing, a man must face his inner fears. So he is drinking and he is fucking and what he is hiding from may be jealousy, though he never says as much.

The narrator's narcissism, abandonment and substance abuse issues make him unreliable in a Holden Caulfield kind of way, and sometimes the voice is more reminiscent of Sallinger than Hemingway:

Everyone's homogenizing everything. They're talking about the good that came out of this and about how New Yorkers came together and how polite the city became. But no one's talking about the people who lost someone, who don't know what to do with themselves, who go on living but not really. It's the not really. They don't know the not really. New York's so big it's covering up the loss, but you can't cover the loss if you lost someone. (217)

This novel contains some really beautiful moments of acknowledging how the events of 9-11 unfairly became something shared by the world, when the world could not possibly comprehend the turmoil inside those whose daily lives, future plans, and very essences were transformed by the physical realities of the terrorist attack. It is not at all comforting to know that someone in Nebraska or London is crying for your loss, standing transfixed in front of their televisions in shock (imagined or real) watching the replays of a member of your family burning or falling or being subsumed in collapsing, crushing, steel and concrete. It does not help. This novel, through its language and layers, despite its attention to a somewhat unsympathetic protagonist, illuminates some of the truths of tragedy and the world response to it. Everyone is trying to claim a piece (much like so many cities got fragments of the buildings' mangled wreckage). There is a fantastic scene in a bar with a firefighter who had come in from Los Angeles in the weeks following the attack:

'When you dressed up in your uniform tonight, you and your brothers, you weren't thinking about the men who died. Admit it. You weren't thinking about the heat or the falling steel or the fear or the pain. You were thinking how women love a man in a uniform. You were thinking you were sure to get laid.'

'Move.'

'Is that your answer?'

'I was there today.'

'I'm here every day. The towers fell and you figured you'd come to New York and get fucked.'... I'm dead. A piece of life here. A piece of life there. Time skipping like my whole past was drunk. When the planes hit I ran downtown. I had to get close, had to get close to him. But I couldn't get close to him. I got close enough to count the floors. I got close enough to see the steel melting. I prayed. I clenched my hands and prayed. And the first tower fell. And the second tower fell. And I stopped praying. (83)

Berlin has put his reoccurring macho protagonist into the aftermath of real horror. Does he manage to capture the interior struggle of those who survived a more than symbolic loss of more than symbols that day? Thankfully, I cannot know. But I do know that he aptly manages moments of irony and longing through carefully crafted dialogue and expertly selected sensory details, if an unlikeable character.

Christina M. Rau reviews John Gosslee's *Blitzkrieg*



Blitzkrieg
John Gosslee
Rain Mountain Press, 2013

Poetry is art. Art is life. Poetry is life. All art one art. This syllogism applies to John Gosslee's *Blitzkrieg*, a multi-media cross-genre collection in three parts. "Blitzkrieg," defined in the very first pages as "a surprise artistic assault by massed electronic, air, sea and ground forces under close coordination," describes the makeup of the book and more specifically the first part, a short stream of poems woven together with anaphora, liturgy, diction, assonance, alliteration, and motif. After the first part, the focus moves to one poem, described and explained in a prose piece, and ends in an array of visuals. Right in the middle of all these words and images, Page 17 directs us to "LISTEN AND WATCH composer Taras Mashtalir's musical score and filmmaker Roberta Hall's adaptation on BLITZKRIEGHQ.com. This website acts as the hub for all the creativity and artistic innovations that make up this collection.

The opening group of poems is short, the poems are short, and they focus on a journey from nature to city and back, across the seasons. The list in "Manhattan In Fall" contains "litter," "a girl on a bicycle," "rain drums," "a troupe of lamb, zucchini, and cranberries," "dead bugs," "streetlamps," "club's music," "a bum," "cheap perfume." From obvious to subtle, from large to small, from sight, to sound, to smell, the list attempts to encompass everything about a moment, though sometimes clichéd. The hackneyed images and ideas about city life do appear in several poems that probably could have been honed through another round of editing.

Fresher imagery appears in the poems that attempt to capture a season rather than a city. "Summer" begins with a typical jokey-sounding line: "a baby crocodile walks up to a dandelion." Then the imagery takes over, showing a traditional literary trope of man and nature

in a way that shows nature to be ubiquitous: “a volley ball flies through the same air that fattens a sail / we stand outside with our mouths open like cups when it rains” (5-6). The parataxis of images allows us to fill in the connection, showing our universal understanding of the world. Then there are stunning lines, so unexpected: “as I ascend my empty boots fill with cold soup” from “A Water Can Sprays A Flowerbed City” and “hair in a jar as a gift” from “In The Presence of a Shadow,” a poem that also uses anaphora in its rhythmic list. These items are not clumsily strewn together to be outrageous or different. They are strategically sewn together as snippets of the world, culminating into a full picture in “Some People Watch it and Fall in Love Again,” a poem that steals lines from all the previous poems, remixing what we first saw into a completely new view.

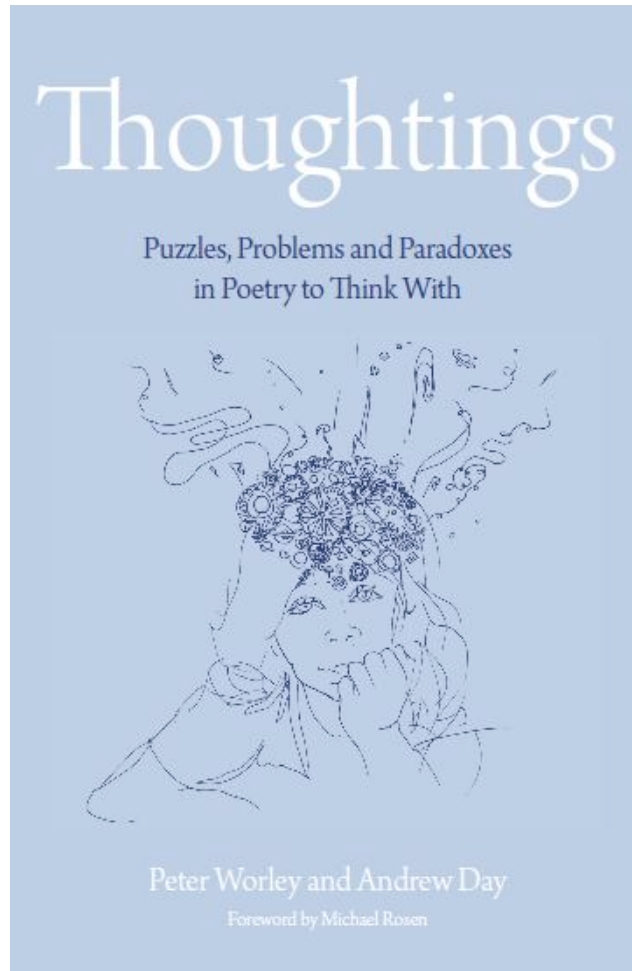
Part II, “Migrations of Portrait of an Inner Life,” offers detailed insight into the crafting of a poem from first spark of inspiration to subtle changes, from submission to rejection, from reading aloud to sending it off in bottles at sea. Like NYC’s MTA’s Poetry In Motion campaign and Nicelle Davis’s “Living Poetry Project,” Gosslee realizes that a poem is more than words on a page and embarked on an undertaking to spread his poem in crafty ways.

It begins with how his imagistic metaphor-based poem, “Portrait of an Inner Life,” became more than just a poem. He explains, “Conceived in a kitchen, it is traveling around the world” (20). For anyone who wants to understand how a poet writes a poem, this section shows an honest take. Gosslee reveals moments of inspiration: “I stood in the worn-out converted-to-kitchen-from-bedroom of a rented apartment with marble print linoleum floor. I looked at the empty doorway leading into the dark hallway and thought, ‘The door has no frame, it’s a frame without a door’ and repeated out loud ‘a frame without a door.’”(20). He also explains the truth of the poet after he has completed a poem: “I read the poem a few times and realized I did not understand everything I had written as a whole” (21). Sometimes a poem comes from places unexpected or unknown, and the finished product is just as puzzling as its origin.

The inspiration and dynamism of the small poem creates a larger project to spread poetry and spread this particular poem’s message. Gosslee chronicles this endeavor using correspondence between himself and editors of journals to which he submitted the poem, and then reporter-like prose to explain the process of creatively distributing the poem on stickers and in bottles, which he refers to as Molotov poems. On the poem-in-a-bottle, he writes: “I wanted to created a functional artifact that also served as a whimsical and original objet d’art” . . . “Though it is illegal to throw bottles with poems into the water, it is art, which makes it right” (25, 29). Conviction in art—that’s what this tale is about. The narrative excites and inspires; it is long enough to explain and short enough as to not exhaust the point.

The outcome of the journey appears in Part III with illustrations by Yumi Sakugawa and Scott Kirschner and photography by Brandon McCrea, including a photo submitted to acolorproject.tumblr.com by Angela Leroux-Lindsey. The poem takes on several costumes and different tones with a backwards ekphrastic dive into visuals that match the words. A multi-media, collective creative project, *Blitzkrieg* intrigues because it is not your average poetry collection. Instead of offering only words on a page, it bombards with words, images, and calls for participation. It can be overwhelming and frenetic, and the poetry, at times, lacks newness or

a sense of being completed. However, the overall goal, to show that poetry is more than a simple poem, clearly emerges, making this reading, viewing, and living of poetry worthwhile.



Thoughtings: Puzzles, problems and paradoxes in poetry to think with

By Peter Worley and Andrew Day

ISBN 9781781350874

\$19.95

Available from www.cbsd.com

Thoughtings is a poetry collection... with a difference. The name 'Thoughtings' was inspired by a 5-year old who, when asked to explain what thinking is without using the word 'think' said 'It's when you're thoughting'.

Children love pondering big philosophical questions like 'Does the universe end?', 'Where is my mind?' and 'Can something be true and false at the same time?' These verses capture that impulse in the growing mind and feed it further.

These are not poems or, at least, not in the traditional sense of the word... They are a kind of poem specifically designed around a particular puzzle or problem that might be thought more philosophy than poetry.

Here's to the joy of puzzlement!

David Berridge reviews the anthology *Homage to Etal Adnan*



Homage to Etel Adnan

Edited by Lindsey Boldt, Steve Dickison, and Samantha Giles
The Post-Apollo Press, 2012

Books of homage often seem unsuitable for review. What is there to critique, amidst all that appreciation? Perhaps the starting point is an event at which fellow writers offer thanks and gratitude, through a mix of portrait, anecdote, and criticism, although the later is always within that frame of appreciation. How should a later, more distanced, less personal reader, gatecrash in?

That was my initial sense here, with a book that began in celebration of Etel Adnan's 2011 receipt of Small Press Traffic's Lifetime Achievement Award, itself an acknowledgement of a career that, since *Moonshots*, Adnan's first book of poetry in 1966, has moved (numerous times) from Beirut to Paris to California, through French, English and Arabic, and a formal diversity of fiction, essay and poetry.

Perhaps because of this I was initially drawn to contributions which explicitly foregrounded utility, such as Thom Donovan's essay on teaching Adnan's book-length poem *The Arab Apocalypse*. Yet, as Adnan — in *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay* — has noted of reflecting upon the Venus de Milo: “all it did was deepen its mystery.” As Donovan asks:

How in teaching, as well as our work as critics, scholars, and theorists, can we perform a poem's/text/s difficulty? How might going down — evoking the hellish recourses of schizophrenia or automatic processes — be absolutely necessary to translate (which is to say, bear across) a text's meaning? Is to enact a text's meaning to suffer it — to become patient to it — beyond mastery?

Donovan's answer is to "presence this impossibility" and it is various understandings of presence — the *present*, the *gift*, the *personality* — that is the achievement of this book, and which this essay seeks to elucidate.

*

Adnan's books of poetry, prose and fiction each foreground an explicit present: be it the Lebanese civil war of her novella *Sitt Marie Rose*, the Californian weather that grounds the meditations of *SEA and FOG*, or an invitation to write on feminism that initiates the correspondence in *Of Cities & Women: Letters to Fawwaz*.

All the contributors here approach that *now* of Adnan's writing. I gather a sample of attempts to show their different vocabularies. David Buuck observes in his essay on Adnan's *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*:

Writing here is the practice of memory — not as the mere recollection or retelling of events, but as the making-present of the past, the scripting of that present-making in writing's work.

Whilst Stephen Motika, writing on Adnan's *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*, describes it as an example of "daybook, the poetic and philosophical thoughts embedded in the daily practice of living" characterized by "fleeting trajectories of thoughts, questions, intuitions, of inner and outer events." For Brandon Shimoda, Adnan's work demonstrates the "supremely generous relationship Etel upholds with the world and its contingencies" which, as Cole Swensen puts it, means a writing that can:

operate gracefully within the world as given; they [Adnan's texts] are an acceptance of it that yet insists upon contributing to it.

Across these different lexicons and emphasis, "now" emerges as a particular form of relation. Like several contributors, Roger Snell describes a social encounter, a dinner party at Adnan's house. Like Motika, Snell sees as exemplary what Adnan writes at the beginning of *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*:

Contrary to what is usually believed, it is not general ideas and a grandiose unfolding of great events that most impress the mind in times of heightened historical upheavals but, rather, it is the uninterrupted flow of little experiences, observations, disturbances, small ecstasies, or barely perceptible discouragements that make up the trivialized day-to-day-living.

For Snell this connects to a "vast storehouse of correspondences" where — quoting Edgardo Cozarinsky — "residues of reading" are "entrusted [with] the continuity of [her] own written words, the lighting, brutal or perfidious." A sample paragraph from Adnan's *Seasons* offers one example:

Today, it looks as if we're doomed. The sky is bent on itself. Gaza Street is flooded with blood. Nature is howling. The wind is transgressing the mind's primary function of securing permanence. Space is the body's prime desire. Stars ignore what it means to worry. Sheets of grayness dampen the spirit.

Donovan, meanwhile, explores this sense of relation via Jalal Toufic's notion that we "need collaborators" to be equal to events such as the Lebanese Civil War. For Adnan in *The Arab Apocalypse* this means terrestrial forces, the posing within the poem of sun and earth as *I*. Motika's essay notes how Mount Tamalpais functions as beast, space-ship, dream, woman, geographical wonder, and site for experiencing the elements.

Robert Grenier's "For Etel" is dated to the now of its composition — May 19 2011 — looking to capture in the rhythms of its prose how his relationship to Adnan and her writing is composed of a series of impulses, observations, clarifications, emphases — which, in Grenier's short text — are conveyed in typography (quote marks, upper and lower case, hyphens, slash, italics):

I remember looking at a Cézanne with Etel (at the MOMA in NY) from afar — speaking to & with each other 'about it' — then walking/ pushing together closer to it, to look & talk some more (as people do) 'about it' — to *See It (& Be In Relation With It)* from that spot...

An *utterly-different-from-myself* 'Human Being', with whom I feel an infinite *Kinship* — a 'Stranger' (like myself), and yet a 'Native' operative, with whom I wish to communicate, 'now & forevermore'...

This demonstrates that, however much we talk about Adnan as a poet "In the Time of War" (to quote a title of her own), she is working with the material of language, and her insights stem from that working.

Such insight is developed by Benjamin Hollander, who contrasts Adnan's comment (also made to him personally, in Adnan's home) that there is "a global uniform tonality in the world today" with her belief that "languages start at home." Hollander asks where, for Adnan, is this *home*:

Beruit? Paris? Sausalito? Where is "first home's" place when other languages take its place, when they can seem like home but be at odds with it, as if "first home" were always accented. Consider how Arabic, French, and English can appear at home and be at odds with it — within Etel's history, depending on where she is, goes, what she does.

Hollander notes how, during the Algerian War of Independence, when Adnan was teaching in English in the US, she considered herself a French Speaking person, until that conflict produced what she called "a problem of a political nature."

To resolve this, rather than writing in French, Adnan decided to paint in Arabic, a visual and rhythmic copying of letter forms she did not fully understand. This is what Hollander (also referencing his own Hebrew) calls "a native accent which has lost the vocabulary to speak" and which for Adnan informs the space she described in an interview for *Poetry Flash* magazine:

What can I say of the fact that I do not use my native tongue and do not have the most important feeling that as a writer I should have, the feeling of direct communication with one's audience.

How to write in the space of this lack? Stacy Szymaszek ends her contribution with an insight that, she says, "I'll phrase as a proverb" and which makes of Adnan's work an injunction to "create new and repeatable experiences with each other." The proverb is a proposition about common experience and wisdom, which also includes the confounding opacity of riddle and koan. Szymaszek's essay begins from Pasolini's remark "I know very well how contradictory one must be in order to be truly consistent." Szymaszek finds, too, in Adnan's work a sense of our "responsibility as individuals to use intelligence to come to terms with our death awareness," which acknowledges what follows from Adnan's declared focus upon the "uninterrupted flow of little experiences"



PIONEERING ITALIAN AMERICAN CULTURE

ESCAPING LA VITA DELLA CUCINA

ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, REVIEWS BY AND ABOUT

DANIELA GIOSEFFI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ANGELINA OBERDAN

ISBN 978-1-599954-046-7, VIA Folios 85, Bordighera Press, NY

Available from Small Press Distribution: www.spdbooks.org or call 1-800-869-7553
www.amazon.com • www.barnesandnoble.com • www.bordigherapress.org

DANIELA GIOSEFFI, American Book Award winning author of 16 books of poetry and prose, has traveled widely, presenting on campuses and at book fairs both here and abroad. She's appeared on NPR, NYC and BBC Radio and TV. She won The John Ciardi Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry, OSIA's NY State Literary Award and grants from the NY State Council for the Arts. She's published in major periodicals, i.e. *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Ms.*, *Chelsea*, *VIA*. A pioneer of Italian American Culture, she began publishing in the 1960's, causing her to be featured in *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-75*, as well as in *La Storia: Five Centers of the Italian in America* wherein she's called "the most celebrated author of Italian American background." She co-founded The Bordighera Poetry Prize. Her verse is etched in marble on a wall of Penn Station, NY, with Walt Whitman's. Her first book of poetry was, *Eggs in the Lake* (BOA Editions, 1977), and her sixth, *Blood Autumn* (VIA Folios, 2008). She edits www.PoetsUSA.com/ and www.Eco-Poetry.org/

Daniela Gioseffi is a pioneering presence in contemporary American literature. Her poetry has won international acclaim. Herein, we see Daniela as a first-rank progressive intellectual. We learn how her art and activism allowed her to transcend some times stultifying traditions of Italian American society; and inspire two generations of feminists, multiculturalists and many others who desire a better America.

— GEORGE GUIDA, President: Italian American Studies Association, Professor of English: City University of New York

If it were not for her Italian name, Daniela Gioseffi would be all over the map of American literature for her accomplishments as a poet, essayist, novelist, feminist, Emily Dickinson Scholar and an avant-garde heroine for justice among her peers. Her writings are emblematic of her commitment to resist oppression and stereotyping of Italian Americans authors who struggle against Chauvinistic literary powers. We find resistance to prejudice and oppression in her life and writings.

— ALFREDO DE PALCHI, author: *The Scorpion's Dark Dance*, Editor: Chelsea Editions, Ltd.

Daniela Gioseffi's *Blood Autumn; Autunno di sangue*, underscores the unique role she's played in the Italian American canon and contemporary poetry. Winner of prestigious awards, she continues to win accolades. *Blood Autumn* brings together traditions that link the deeply personal with the mythic and social in the intensity of lived experience.

— JOSEPHINE GATTUSO HENDIN, Professor of English: New York University, Author: *The Right Thing to Do*

Since the 1960s Daniela Gioseffi has been an irrepressible and unforgettable voice in many of the key debates in American culture. Her . . . advocacy has given a special validity to her work in the fields of civil rights and of anti-war activism no less than in the struggles against mafia stereotypes and for an Italian American literary tradition. This book displays the depth and range of her commitment and contribution.

— ROBERT VISCUSI, Author: *Astoria and Ellis Island*, Founding President: The Italian American Writers Association

*

In an interview with Adnan (not included here, but available on Adnan's website) Lynne Tillman says: "I think you're trying to make a place from language." In Cole Swensen's contribution, this is partly understood in relation to Adnan's work as a visual artist, how writing and painting create a whole from "two completely different sorts of imaginative expansion."

Swensen is drawn to where the two practices come closest together, in Adnan's leporellos (accordion books), which include both text and illustration (including those partially understood Arabic letters as examples of both word and image), not through the sequential, single pages of a book, but the accordion's continual scroll. The relation to Adnan's writing, argues Swensen, is a three-dimensionality:

This versatility unleashes a three-dimensionality — she's covering a lot of territory, absolutely, but it's not, as the term suggests, only a great and varied place stretching out in all directions; it's also the huge vault of the sky above it, and it incorporates all the time it takes our imagination to cross it.

Which, for Swensen, connects to writing through the (handwritten) line, how it:

balances the intentionality that allows it to be legible with the accidental that guarantees its uniqueness and allows it to express a single moment in the writer's life, that allows gesture to remain alive on the page as a trace of the irreducible humanity of the author/ artist.

In Adnan's (non-accordion) books — often trade paperbacks from The Post-Apollo Press — this tension often leads to an emphasis on the paragraph as measure, like that from *Seasons* quoted earlier. They offer a moment that is complete, but also partially vanishing into the greater whole of the book itself. As a reader I commit to each paragraph as it forms, but find it immediately, willingly replaced (rather than, for example being a numbered axiom in a logical sequence). This shows in action what Adnan herself observes in that *Poetry Flash* discussion:

I have to be clear in my intentions, not in my words... There is a non-figurative or non-wordly world that is ours. But you have to express it through objective things which are colors or words...

Contributions by Brandon Shimoda and Anne Waldman explore this "non-figurative or non-wordly world that is ours." For Shimoda, landscape is understood as elemental, which gives him a language for his relationship to Adnan's work that accommodates reaches of time and space, the external world and a rich, imaginative consciousness, but resists forming that into too-rigid examples of "deep image." The hope of such writing is to bring such expanses close to the everyday, conversation, love and other dailynesses.

That is how I read statements by Shimoda that describe Adnan's writing "as elemental, as water," where "every perception is still wet" producing the effect of "synthesizing both center and margins of the matrix of her and others' experience." Shimoda calls his relationship with Adnan "ancient and wholly regenerating, as love must be to create the islands it connects." He asks: "How else to build a life for oneself than to become the impossible element."

Anne Waldman's contribution is a private performance of Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse*, which etroit the full range of expressive capabilities: mouth and face enact the handwritten glyphs punctuating that poem's lines, positing the reader as "echolocation," the imperative to find vocal and gestural equivalents for "this text's magnitude of display and yearning and urgent alarm."

Later in her essay — a part of Waldman's *The Iovis Trilogy* — this voicing leads to personal memories of sleeping in the desert near Abu Simbel; evoke Mao and Rimbaud; discuss (via

Adonis) the value accorded to recitation (as distinct from composition) in pre-Islamic Arab poetry. Waldman concludes by describing her use of such a performative reading when teaching the poetry of Berber (Amazigh) schoolchildren in Marrakech, using the poetry of William Blake.

If Shimoda inhabits and extends an encrypted opacity of the glyph, trying on the page to make of it something relational (recall Donovan's "presence this impossibility"), then Waldman sees (this) text as something demanding enactment, a mirroring in another that in its inevitable transformations seeks meaning in poetry as an experience of the "non-wordly world" coming to articulacy via ecstasy, terror, prophecy, and penance.

*

These, then, are some shifting lexicons of ways and words through which the contributors to this volume articulate the I-Thou space they each form with Adnan's work. Is it possible, in a space so intimate, to make some more general statements about Adnan herself and her example, to form, perhaps, a useful *type* or *figure* of the writer?

Swensen concludes that we should regard Adnan as a philosopher for whom "philosophy [is] made physical, tangible." Adnan taught philosophy at the Dominican College of San Rafael in California. In *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay* she observes of Nietzsche: "there's no system, no hard center to his work, but a series of fundamental intuitions." The Nietzsche quote that follows is "I am a rendez-vous of experiences," whilst his nine summers in Sils Maria get described in Adnan's essay on Mount Tamalpais as "nine ascensions into the next century."

But a philosopher of what? Snell suggests Adnan's work is held together by a "core set of ethics that refute the irrationality of our current time." For Szymaszek, Adnan is a philosopher of love, whose fundamental insight is "the violence caused by people's inability to hold space for many points of view" and how this "translates as an inability to love."

Perhaps, though, such frames and roles are, in Adnan's words, too much "a hard center." The contributors here, I think, find a freedom in Adnan's work which comes from its forms of commitment and engagement but also from a lack of any direct indications of how the writer earns a living. "Writing puts the world on hold" Adnan herself notes in *Seasons*. This means attention and writing themselves appear to offer a life sustaining economy.

Formally, too, "no hard center" means a writing whose component parts and conventions are fluid. This is what Laynie Browne observes of Adnan's *Paris, When It's Naked* in a Jacket2 commentary on the Poets' Novel, writing how "She [Adnan] has chosen place [Paris] for character" with the consequence that:

At the same time the body of the speaker is walking through the streets, taking part in what she observes by embodying many possibilities of experience, she is also composing questions about existence, language, and perception. This novel, located in a city extends outward from that city to exist on many planes, locations, and modes of consciousness.

Such adaptation of devices of character and plot is also applicable to how ideas of *contemporary*, *engaged*, the *political* and *commitment* become revealed in Adnan's work as a consequence of ever renewing acts of perception, rather than as a pre-defined quality to cite and impose. This is what emerges from Joanne Kyger's poem-essay, which entwines Kyger's and Adnan's words, as

— referring to Adnan’s *Journey to Mount Tamalpais* — Kyger notes “I view from the west side. Etel lives on the east side/ And sees all sides/ It seems effortless, the kinetics of her writing/ The balance of land, water, and sky.” The remainder of Kyger’s contribution — on the “weather”: literally, the details of climate in their shared California home but also, for both of these attentive poet-minds, source of many sorts of news.

*

For all the connections made, *Homage to Etel Adnan* reveals a unique figure. Only Roger Snell compares Adnan to other writers (Luis Cernuda, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Abdelfattah Kilito, Rebecca West and Juan Goytisolo). I thought myself of Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, and Hélène Cixous, with all their differences to Adnan and each other, for their sharing a fierce ambition and commitment to a certain space of written consciousness.

In diverse ways and places these writers also do what Jennifer Scappettone has observed, writing about Adnan when introducing a volume of the Belladonna Elders Series, where she included Adnan and Lyn Hejinian under an editorial frame of “poetry, landscape, apocalypse.” Scappettone offers one formulation of what contributors to *Homage to Etel Adnan* move towards and around:

Here is a task of poetry: to sense the terrain in a city that has done its utmost to balk at the limits and curvatures of landscape, to obscure its own shores and patterns of light; to seek out the margins disregarded by business, a few blocks or thousand miles away... To throw those echoes trammled by our administered time-space continuum of information, virtual plenitude, into more expansive relation, restoring distances, hostilities even. Into riverine lines — of social affects and affections, a neighborliness and a crossing that is not a leveling of identity between these and “the un-visited latitudes,” animal, landscape, other.

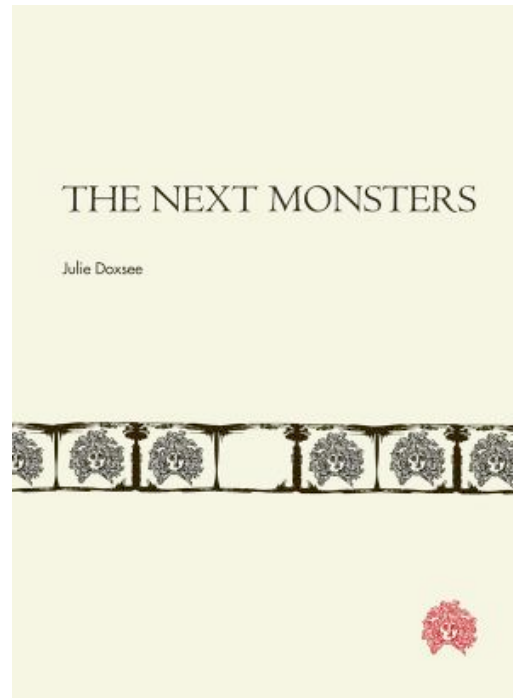
Without Adnan as a literal, physical neighbor to visit, it is in/as writing that I have tried to measure my own participation or not in such “social affects and affections.” For all that I admire it, a response like Shimoda’s does not feel available to me. For now, I need more “wordly world” strategies that utilize my distance, to make a figure and a type from the ideas and examples of writing and writer this book propagates.

Thus I have come to share the possibilities and doubts that characterize Thom Donovan’s classroom. I also take off from this book and, apart from this essay, look at how these questions are explored poetry to poetry: in Thom Donovan’s *The Hole* and Stacy Szymaszek’s *Hyperglossia*; through ongoing installments of Jennifer Scappettone’s *Exit 43*, its appearance in print alongside Adnan’s “Celestial Cities”: a sequence of poems (in that Belladonna Elders volume) dedicated to Szymaszek.

For all their continuities, each book of Adnan’s I read suggests another way of understanding what *Homage to Etel Adnan* astutely and affectionately explores. In giving examples here, I have not considered at all the short fiction of *Master of the Eclipse*, or the sequences of poems that thread through *The Indian Never Had a Horse* and *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage*. Nor have I made any mention of the fifty years of paintings exhibited at Documenta 13, the collaborations with composer Gavin Bryars...

To think about Adnan’s work, then, is to be reminded of something she wrote in *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*: “There is no system to perception. Its randomness is its secret.” Instead of a

conclusion offering closure, I'm thinking about all that I've said here in relation to one of the gathered notes and observations that follows: "It seems to me that I write what I see, paint what I am."



The Next Monsters

by Julie Doxsee

Paperback / 96p. / Poetry / \$14.95

ISBN 978-1-939568-03-8

Purchase today at <http://www.blackocean.org/the-next-monsters/>

The Next Monsters navigates the cobbles of human monsterness. The image of a white horse in the road produces a sense of human belonging, while a domestic dispute fractures that calm, exposing a new monster. These poetic mini-essays churn with violence and love, healing and torture—one always eclipsing the other—and offer challenges to the limitations of identity. The Next Monsters embraces the alienation, imagination, and catharsis that scaffold the self.

Praise for Julie Doxsee's previous works:

"Each poem in Undersleep affects the space around it; the space on the page, perhaps even the reader's space, the brainspace one uses to conceive the more chimerical compositions of poetry . . . like sculptures in a gallery; they force an observer to navigate through and reconsider the space they inhabit. This is an array of poems that touch you in unique, troubling and frequently pleasurable ways."

—Coldfront

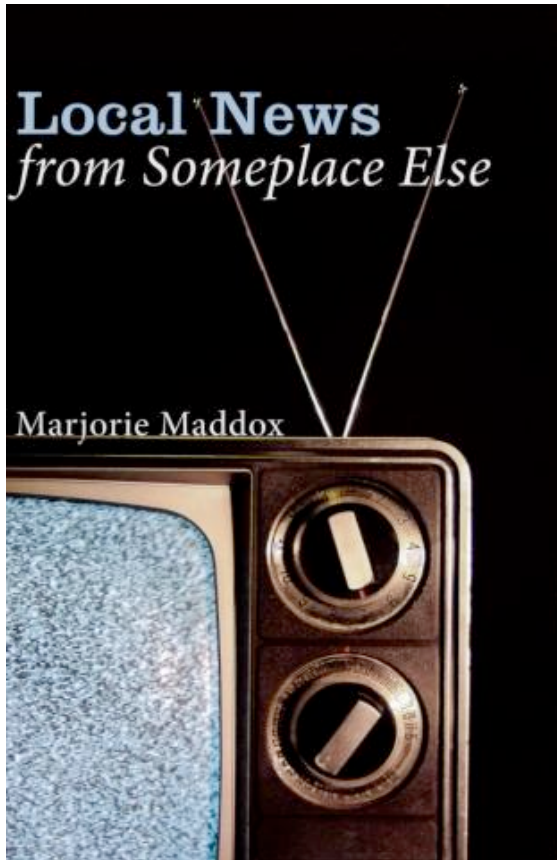
"One cannot help but be quietly, delicately overwhelmed and, at last, astounded."

—The Volta

"Undeniably beautiful in its richness of sound. And what it means is intimately intertwined with its evocation of pure emotion."

—Bookslut

Brief Alphabet of Grief: Carolyn Perry on *Local News from Someplace Else* by Marjorie Maddox



Local News from Someplace Else
Marjorie Maddox
Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013

The cover of poet Marjorie Maddox’s latest collection is arresting: after the bold “LOCAL NEWS,” the eye moves immediately to the stark image of a TV, and the image certainly fits the title. But wait: it’s an old-fashioned television, the kind you may remember from a long-ago living room, with picture tube, rabbit ears, and antique knobs and dials. This is going to be a different sort of “news,” and the rest of the title, “from Someplace Else,” now registers. Besides the surprising contradiction of “local” and “someplace else,” the title, coupled with the image, now suggests other possibilities. “News” that connects us to the past perhaps? “News” that pertains to us in a particular location but also connects us to other places, other people, other times?

To find answers to these questions, we need only open the book to the first poem, “The Postcard.” We imagine those colorful missives sent by travelers to loved ones at home, pictures

of faraway places, carrying exotic stamps, with cheerful messages of adventures in other lands. Yet the poem's epigraph shows this postcard is startlingly different:

Summer is going quickly. We are
very busy. My brother and his family all
died in a plane crash. Hope to see
you soon when we fly that way...

What we scrunch on a 3 x 5
wants happiness as bland
as the heat waving at us
from beneath its sunglasses and umbrella,
simplicity so boring we relax in it,
order another drink.

But somewhere between
the Eiffel Tower and Empire State Building,
between your miss you's and wish you were here's,
fact slips in, inked lightning across skies
as bright as a Las Vegas smile.

In a postcard of Sunset Strip
amidst a list of Hollywood celebrities:
"The plane was the same
as JFK Jr.'s." And on the backside
of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier:
"The memorial service was short."

The playfulness of "heat waving" and the "Las Vegas smile" contrast with stark messages of death. The remaining stanzas give the speaker's reaction and set the tone for the entire collection. With a "you" that addresses the postcard, or perhaps by extension also another person, maybe the reader, in taut language the speaker goes on:

All summer I listen
for clouds cracking open with you,
your brief alphabet of grief swooping in
from the skies with the late morning mail.

There is room here to land
in the ordinary,
a clearing for what is missing.

I'm waiting to hear from Madrid,
from Tokyo and Madagascar,
where loss, I've read, flies fastest
in the smallest of words.

Some of those "smallest of words" spring at once to mind: *die, end, lose, grief, no*. We are in a poetic landscape where the news from someplace else is ominous and dark.

Scanning the Table of Contents, we see that ominous promise extended. The poems are divided into three sections, and the titles of many in the first two sections seem pulled straight from yesterday's headlines: "Fifth Grader Imagines Taking over School," "Seven-Year-Old Girl Escapes from Kidnappers," "Fatal Shock Mystery: Experts Look for Answers after Tragedy," "Cancer Diagnosis," "Reoccurring Storms," "Woman, 91, Frozen to Floor." Maddox, a poet who lives and writes in Pennsylvania, gives us visions of deaths, disasters, and tragedies that resonate nationwide and beyond, many related to familiar American events: 9/11, school shootings, mine

airwaves of our county, / our headquarters, my desk. /... only to firework into flame.” The poem’s language is terse yet controlled, with rhythm and line breaks (“...that 757 diving / toward disaster”) suggesting the motion of the plane as it falls toward the terrible explosion evoked by the haunting, alliterative “firework into flame.”

The poem’s third section gives us the voices of the passengers’ cell phones, those “21st century messengers”:

Drafted, conduits of chaos and courage,
we assisted duty, the fear beneath:
unrehearsed confessions, the 23rd Psalm,
I love you’s saved on answering machine tapes,
last minutes of bravery rewound and replayed
after that unanimous *No!* filled the fields
and abandoned mines of Pennsylvania
with lonely awe.

In the next two sections come voices of a service station owner in Shanksville who hears “that fire whistle blowing / something fierce” and a group of bikers who pass

the whole damn field on fire,
trees plowed down and this big hole—
broad as a barn and deep—
uninvited in the ground.

Then we hear the voice of the first photographer, who “clicked automatically, / focusing pain” and, in the poem’s final section, the speaker watches and hears a Mother at the Year Memorial: “‘Such an ugly thing to happen / in this lovely place,’ she said, / turning to leave.”

Anyone alive then in America remembers the events of 9/11/01 in vivid detail. Marjorie Maddox gives us in this poem a new entry into that final act of the disaster, making us see the event through the eyes of new “witnesses” and thereby making the experience newly intense. The poet masterfully molds her language to the characters, and through them we connect to the events in a new way, as “news from someplace else.” Collectively, these poems about violence, death, and danger tap into our common worry: how can we feel safe in our unsafe world? What does it take to survive amid the threats? Or, as the question is posed in the book’s title poem: “Whom can we trust / when a smiling anchor / prophesies the utmost danger / around the corner / of tomorrow?”

The answer is to be found in other poems interspersed throughout *Local News from Someplace Else*, particularly in the final section, poems about love, parenthood, family and home. For Maddox writes also of quiet, everyday moments, like the backyard barbeque of “June 1st Liturgy,” the “weathered / boards” of an old home in “Still Life of House in Late March,” or the awe-inspiring moment when expectant parents view a sonogram in “First Layout.” Even small pleasures like using “Frequent Flyer Miles” and the rush of driving a new rental car are celebrated here.

Two of my favorite poems concern such moments of quiet joy, such as the luxuriant pleasure of “Extra Towels” in a hotel room. How easy it is to relate to that “we” who “are in love / with room service at midnight” and exult in the “seductive allure of terry” and “the hundred-plus / channels of cable / deliciously at our command.” In “Anniversary Coffee,” a couple quietly toast the comfort and familiarity of a long relationship:

On this side of plate glass,
the Pennsylvania sky threatens

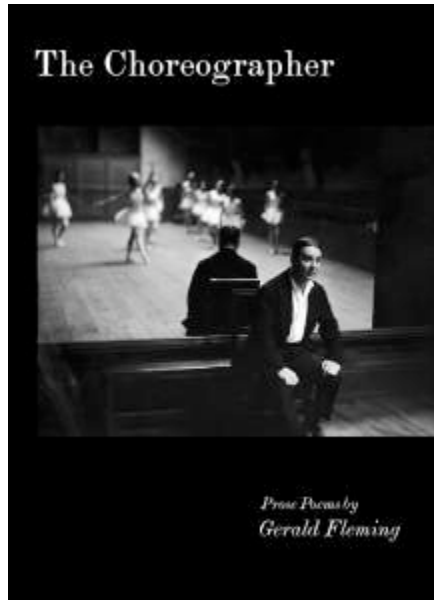
no one, calms us with what we aren't,
such perfect summer squall the calm

we love in morning
coffee and split croissant.

The simplicity of this poem's language perfectly mirrors its subject. The line breaks are crafted to elicit from the reader the same calm the couple feels, sheltered from the rain and enjoying an ordinary, loving moment. The worry caused by the word "threatens" resolves with the surprise in the next line: "no one." We can exhale. The repetition of the word "calm/s" induces a sense of languor, and peace.

In *Local News from Someplace Else*, Marjorie Maddox gives us a world outside full of danger and disaster, but her poems offer visions of hope, and "the sad joy that lets her see / all that the world is." We are reassured that what helps us face the dangers, and survive, are the connections we form with those we love. In the end, "what we hold / is ourselves holding on."

Deborah Bogen Reviews Gerald Fleming's prose poetry collection *The Choreographer*



The Choreographer
Gerald Fleming
Sixteen Rivers Press, 2013

Gerald Fleming's *The Choreographer* is a book of prose poems, but reading this distinctive collection a host of other descriptors come to mind: fables, illuminations, unsettling commentaries, insightful allegories, folk tales for sophisticated grown-ups, even bits of brilliant comedy. This is a book filled with dazzling short-shorts that Borges, Ponge, Scliar and Cortazar would have loved. Fleming's detailed attention to what we call "ordinary life" is enriched by his long-term immersion in art, writing, music and travel. And as Fleming gives voice to certain aspects of the human psyche he exposes our everyday experience as both exotic and familiar, significant and mundane. The result is story-telling that is playful, deep and often surreal. We are seduced. Take "Applause" where

For example, you're in a strange city—*this* strange city—it's night, and you go into a café—any café with good reading light—and the waiter seats you at a table against a bare white wall, and the guitarist, whom you did not notice—short beard, kind eyes—begins playing, and before even opening your book—say Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*—you're moved by the guitarist's rendition of a difficult Spanish song, and you decide to applaud, and find in that full café yours is the only applause.

There you are "in a strange city": the immediacy of the moment is clear. But so is a sense of distance, for *YOU* are not really in a strange city. You are watching someone else in an imaginary city that is now doubly strange because the situation, the predicament of the one you watch although fictional is absolutely familiar. And so is the question posed. As the guitarist plays on, must the applause go on too? Has the generous clapper started doing something that he now regrets? It's one of those small but tenuous moments, arresting and unresolved. You want to know what happens next.

In “Applause” Fleming describes a dilemma we face daily: who gets our attention? How committed are we to our own interests, our own work, and how much do we owe our children, our students, our co-workers, the world? How much do we owe some kid with a guitar in a café who is really trying to communicate art? And when we, through some good-hearted impulse, find ourselves caught – derailed from our project and awash in the possibly trivial – is there any way to extricate ourselves that is gentle, effective and ultimately right?

Fleming uses this *familiar/strange* dichotomy in another piece based on a story most readers will know well: the Crucifixion.

While he doesn’t say it’s the crucifixion of Christ his opening “tableau”, “three men on crosses, assorted provokers and grievors below, sky leaden...” as well as his reference to paintings by Giotto, Raphael and Goya make the point. What interests me here is Fleming’s brand new description of an often depicted scene. He writes to explore the facts. How hard would it have been to dig a hole to set up the cross? And was it a cross, really? How were the pieces held together? He uses anatomical terms (“the deltoids...the pectoralis major”) and a woodworker’s knowledge (“the cross-strut surely not mortised”) to describe what may have gone on. As he questions everything, including the actual event (“Let’s say it did occur.”) the reader realizes Fleming is reimagining the scene in an attempt to approach truth. The truth, or a truth. Some kind of truth. His efforts, workman-like and detailed, force a conclusion — we don’t know that much about this occurrence. For over a thousand years it has been portrayed on canvas, on paper, in drama and song, and yet we have a superficial knowledge at best about an event that has inspired both great acts of faith and goodness, and unspeakable horror and harm.

But the prose poems in *The Choreographer* are certainly not all morality tales. Let me point you to “Pasencore,” an extended joke that never flags, entertaining us with each step in the set-up and delighting us with the punch line, and to “Audio guide: The Paintings You Missed.” These pieces are funny, generous and charming and should, I think, be read aloud to friends at dinner parties. If you have ever protested bad behavior or run into a less-than-perfect espresso you’ll be quickly caught up in “An Honest Cup of Coffee,” and if, like me, you love the gossipy feel of good epistolary poetry you may want to read “Letter” first.

And finally, prepare yourself for the enchantment of the center suite of the book, “Sephardic Airs: Variations.” This series, based on 15th century songs for violin and guitar written by Jorge Liderman, reads like a miniature novel woven in exquisitely lyrical verse. In the section titled *Mi Padre Era De Francia*, Fleming writes:

My father was from France, Mother told me once. Marseille is in France. Nani is in Marseille. I know that these three are things not together, but on a piece of paper I draw each of them as flowers— one blue, one red, one yellow. I cut them in a different way on the table, understanding that they are different flowers.

Here again Fleming embraces life’s ambiguity, finding in romantic illusion the potential for depth and truth.

Mother, if I die in this brutal house with this stern nurse, know that I still wear the silver chain and that Andarleto wears a gold one. Know that even if my eyes are blind with sweat I can see almond flowers.

Like the characters in “Mi Padre Era De Francia” the prose poems in this book are “different flowers.” What unifies *The Choreographer* is Fleming’s distinctive and mature voice. To quote Keith Taylor’s recommendation “He has mastered an American language that finds joy in the

words we use and fear in the artifacts of our popular culture.” This is a book to savor and to read again and again. Enjoy.

THE STORY OF EMILY DICKINSON’S MASTER

“Neighbor and Friend and Bridegroom....”

“*Wild Nights! Wild Nights!*”

A Biographical Novel by

American Book Award Winning Poet DANIELA GIOSEFFI

With a Non-Fiction Foreword that Validates the Biographical Novel:

Lover of Science and Scientist in Dark Days of the Republic

“A page turning tale of a bitter sweet love affair (1857-1865)...Gioseffi, a compelling storyteller, cleverly incorporates Dickinson’s poems, capturing the intellectual, cultural, and political ideas and voices of the nineteenth century.... Gioseffi helpfully advises Dickinson scholar’s to read her non—fiction essay [or foreword] first. The novel is alive with detail and heartfelt emotion....Gioseffi introduces a Dickinson most readers have not met before.”

– BARBARA KELLY, Book Review Editor:

THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



Photo, believed by some scholars to be Emily Dickinson, age 30. Photo, Master William Smith Clark, Eminent Botanist of Amherst

“Gioseffi’s work overflows with poetic vision.”

NONA BALAKIAN, former staff reviewer, *The New York Times*

“... a gifted writer.... A stunning essay [foreword.] It should be a book...”

GALWAY KINNELL, Pulitzer Prize & National Book Award winning poet

“I like the way your foreword richly evokes Dickinson’s life and times.”

ROBERT HASS, Former Poet Laureate USA

“The essay [foreword] on Dickinson is fascinating and convincing....”

ALICE QUINN, Director: Poetry Society of America.

NOW AVAILABLE as an E-BOOK for all styles of readers:

The Story of Emily Dickinson’s Master ISBN: 9781483506456 or

hardcopy *Wild Nights! Wild Nights* ISBN: 978-1-935514-44-2

www.Amazon.com www.barnesandnoble.com Baker & Taylor

Sally Deskins on **Kristina Marie Darling's** *VOW*



VOW
Kristina Marie Darling
BlazeVOX Books, 2014

In *VOW*, Kristina Marie Darling magically brings forth what is lurking in the back of our heads, the somewhat lost eeriness of our own thoughts. Her style of poetry writing in the margins is somewhat daunting at first, actively utilizing your own reflection to fill in the story. Darling’s dare to seek out the margins, along with her challenge of the norm—specifically, why assume what a wedding or marriage should look like? What is in our brains that make such images of the white dress “normal”?

Too, the minimalism of words, coupled with the dark, almost monochromatic gray cover art which stretches over the back cover, sans any words of praise, lets readers appreciate the book for its mere being; in this world of kindles and ebooks, it is a work of art in itself. And of the cover art by Noah Saterstrom is a faceless girl in a dress high up on a tree, trying or pretending, or surrealistically, about to float away. And so we do in Section I, “Vow,” Darling’s mysterious saga of marriage and a burning house (or is the marriage burning?), wandering through dreams and reality, endlessly contemplating “shattered glass” and what the “white dress” resembles:

What does a white dress *actually* resemble? Fallen branches. A dead hummingbird. You watch as it hesitates on the cusp of *otherworldly*.

Before, I had sewn the dress together as: pure threshold, a bridge between myself and the rest of him.

Tonight I’ll dream of housefires, everything I burned for warmth. Smoke rising from a silk hemline. Tell me if this

changes anything--?

And quite tellingly, with her trademark unfinished, allowing readers to realize significance:

I wanted to wear the dress, but neither of us knew how—

“Appendix A: Marginalia” and “Endnotes to a History of Brides” are the most surreal of the five sections, of footnote definitions and memos, abstractly aiding us in filling in the blanks of the “Vow,” or perhaps speaking to weddings in general:

³ “Yes, of course, the dress. Its laces were drawn so tight I could barely speak. All around me, hothouse flowers fading in the tremendous heat.”

“Appendix B: The Letters” seems more action-oriented, as though the main character’s thoughts are recorded at various moments of anticipation, as happenings draw near. Still, the writing is none the more comprehensive, allowing the subtlety and beauty of Darling’s words to breathe and sink in:

“*

& the fire, like a noxious flower
its long slender throat—“

The last Section, “Appendix C: Misc. Fragments,” rouses with complete sentences, revisiting the “Vow”’s story, nearly providing conclusions, though readers are left on the edge:

“A small fortress. I can no longer remember
the weight of a bouquet in my hand.” (50)

“*

Shots are fired at a distance.
But what else--?” (51)

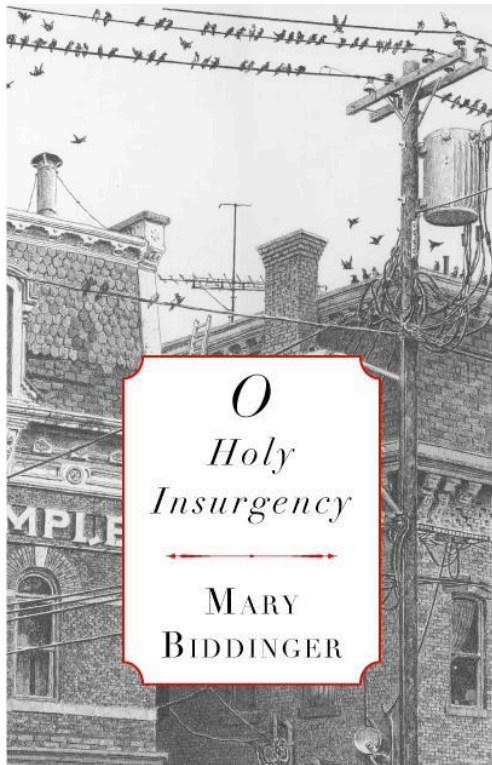
This query echoes throughout, as does the last question posed:

“*

Tell me if this changes anything--?” (56)

With this, it is as if she is literally asking readers if her writing has made an impact. Darling’s keen use of the visual, and play with punctuation are a major role in her crafting of this mystifying story of a woman wrestling with culturally stated wedding traditions. With her void and remarkable delicate verbiage and daring narrative, Darling forces the confronting of such traditions in readers’ own minds and histories. And with that, perhaps asking, how else can such institutions be defined or carried out, without becoming ablaze with fraught? As Darling exemplifies, let us examine the margins, push the boundaries and maybe we will see.

An Insurgency of Language: Stacia M. Fleegal's review of Mary Biddinger's poetry collection *O Holy Insurgency*



O Holy Insurgency
Mary Biddinger
Black Lawrence Press, 2013

Mary Biddinger tells us many things of passion, pain, and life in the Midwest, but her business isn't in telling them straight. The poems in *O Holy Insurgency* are true lyricism in that all objects are imbued with symbolism, and mood is prevalent over narrative. Her storytelling is more mythmaking – not for details that are apocryphal, but rather given the weight of archetypes and allegories. The ordinary box fans multiply of their own will; the banal eggs mock from the fridge. She's not describing a chair, or a lake, but the space around them, the space they occupy, and always to say something larger about the world in which they exist. "Every flame is a house" (p. 29). And every poem here is a flame.

Most compelling is a pervasive, heady sensuality that Biddinger renders with inventive associations and reverence for physicality. Most of her love poems are quietly ecstatic, and her most sensual images aren't opulent, but earthy, suggestive of an impoverished hedonism that takes what warmth and pleasure it can, when it can.

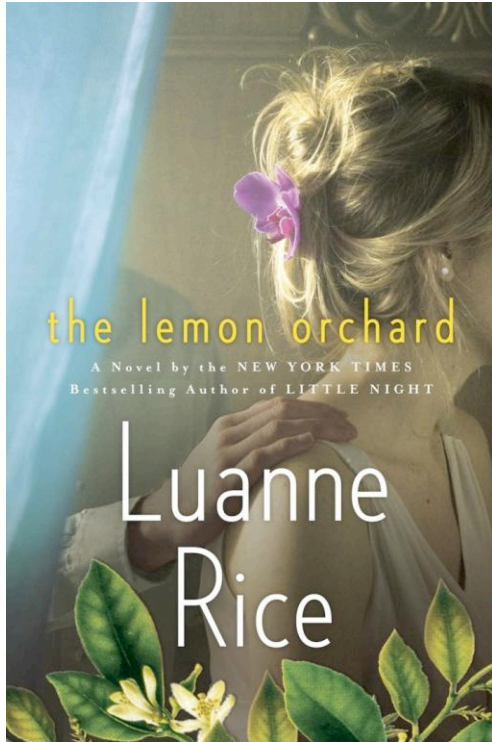
Lovers are life-givers in Biddinger's hands. "The azaleas shut / their blooms when you opened / me. A new kind of reverence / broke tabletops instead of mending" she writes to a seemingly singular lover, never named, but omnipresent. "My thigh could educate entire / districts. My left breast knew more / than the average philosopher" (p. 56). "At a certain point," the poet divulges, "I began to wonder / what the springs in the mattress thought / of us" (p. 44). In the way that people say the sexiest love scenes in films are those that drip anticipation and know when to shut out the voyeurs, so does the intimacy in a Biddinger poem feel reverent, yet no less electric for it: "My head / once broke through the bedroom wall: / not cardboard, but glossed paper. Nobody // anticipated our vigor" (p. 70). Later, bodies slam "against all doors // in the hotel, screaming *our love / is better than your love*" (p. 81).

To speak of a lover in terms of broken bedroom walls and tabletops is to also acknowledge the duality of such fire, the burned cheeks and singed hair of one's utter vulnerability to a chosen partner. Of course Biddinger will shoot through her love poems with primal resistance, because we all resist being vulnerable at times. It is supposed. It's so human, it's holy. Poems like "A Pact" and "Treaty Line" are authentic, universal. "We'd lay our guns together / on the dresser, touching but not / overlapping," she writes in the former (p. 62). In the latter, "This apron // is the only one for me, its tender bleach line / at the waist" (p. 17). The poems span the breakdown of the couple's insurgency to their desire for one another, from the early image of "the knives / we had no idea we'd ever find" (p. 27) to the promise that "the only pies / that cool will be cooling for you" in the penultimate poem "The Bravery" (p. 88).

Biddinger's greatest insurgency is to boring, familiar poetry. Lee Ann Roripaugh wrote, in her blurb, of this poet's "crisp pivots and dovetail joints." Yes. Like the wrens, swallows, and various other birds that swoop through so many of her tropes, her poems fly, are pure rhythm, and so much the better serve the imaginative leaps and associations she makes. Makes, in fact, so consistently well that I envision the actual poet speaking this way, as if the poems aren't at all made, but discovered, conjured, seen as a face in a fire. What found poems so often endeavor to do.

O Holy Insurgency is Biddinger's third collection. Her previous work is stellar (2007's *Prairie Fever*; 2011's chapbook *St. Monica*). I don't always know why I pick up books and thumb to particular poems over and over, and I'm ok with that. I come to this poet's work often; it makes me feel like I've walked through a small town on a cold, damp day, but full on diner food and the company of someone beloved, so not minding, observing everything in crisp detail, and alive, seeing my breath. Mary Biddinger is one of my absolute favorite poets.

Suzanne Hard on **Luanne Rice's** novel *The Lemon Orchard*



The Lemon Orchard
Luanne Rice
Pamela Dorman Books, 2013

In her 2013 novel, *The Lemon Orchard*, author Luanne Rice succeeds in creating a compelling mystery and romance. Her characters play out universal human tragedies of loss, and the heartbreak that is particular to the world of immigration laws and the US-Mexican border. Along the way, Rice provides her readers with an education on such varied subjects as forensic anthropology, lemon farming, and the activities of those providing humanitarian assistance to the determined but vulnerable border crossers, and of those charged with enforcing the increasingly restrictive regime of U.S. immigration laws.

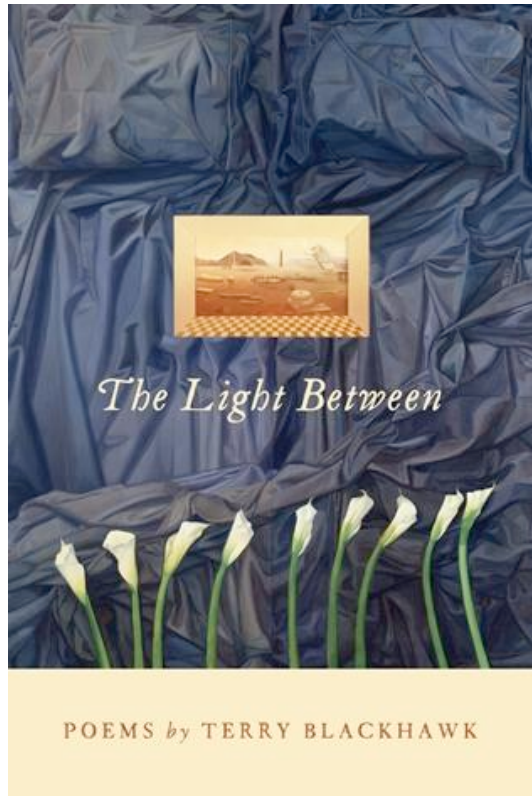
Julia Riley, an anthropologist with an interest in the consequences of human migration, comes to Malibu to house-sit her aunt and uncle's large Spanish colonial-style home in the Santa Monica Mountains, where the family continues their century-old tradition of raising lemons. Soon after her arrival she meets the farm manager, Roberto Rodriguez, an undocumented Mexican immigrant, and they discover that five years previously they both suffered a terrible loss, perhaps the worst one can experience—the loss of a child. This commonality, and the decency and compassion of these characters, brings them together when their differences in ethnicity,

education, economic status, etc., may have kept their paths from anything more than superficial overlaps.

Rice transcends the limits of her genres and is at her best when she is telling the story of the mystery of Rosa Rodriguez, Roberto's young daughter who becomes separated from her father at the end of their treacherous and futile border crossing attempt through the Sonoran desert. Rice provides extensive detail about the world of those seeking to leave behind economic desperation in Mexico for the opportunities of "El Norte." Roberto is captured by US immigration officials and never again sees his daughter, who had been impacted terribly by the deprivations of their crossing, and was barely clinging to life when he left her to intercept what he assumed was his transportation to safety. He is tortured by not knowing her fate after their separation. Julia recognizes that, while she suffers daily from the loss of her teenage daughter, she at least has some degree of closure about the fate of her child. She comes to care deeply for Roberto, resolves to try to help him determine what happened to Rosa after he was arrested by ICE.

Julia's investigative efforts lead her to Jack Leary, the now-retired border patrol agent who was responsible for Roberto's capture. Leary recognizes the loss of Rosa as a tragic failure in his career, and is motivated to solve the mystery of her fate. Rice interweaves the lives and journeys of these three well-written main characters—Julia, Roberto and Jack – each seeking, for their own distinct reasons, to find Rosa. Each brings different experiences and abilities to the far-reaching search. As the story traces the efforts of its protagonists, Julia is compelled to solve the mystery of this lost child, and embarks on a course that threatens both deliverance and heartache. Rice artfully constructs her story with chapters that move back and forth through time, and amongst the viewpoints of her various characters. In addition, it is clear that Rice has done extensive research, which she smoothly integrates into her writing, and this makes for a rich experience for the reader.

Margaret Rozga Reviews Terry Blackhawk's poetry collection *The Light Between*



The Light Between
Terry Blackhawk
Wayne State University Press, 2012

Knowing of Terry Blackhawk's nationally acclaimed work in Detroit as a poet educator and founder of the InsideOut Literary Arts Project, I picked up *The Light Between*, her latest volume of poetry, expecting poems set in Detroit and somehow touching on the joys and struggles of the young Detroiters who find their poetic voices in InsideOut projects including its successful slam teams. Instead I found in the mostly Western and Florida settings of these poems another side of Terry Blackhawk. These poems speak of her marriage, its faltering, its end and her new beginnings. The usual caution to distinguish between speaker in the poem and the poet herself seems not to apply here since she names herself within one of the early poems.

This poetry, then, might be called "personal," yet I hesitate to engage that label here. Her commitment to her work in Detroit may also be an intimate part of the person who is Terry Blackhawk. Separating the personal from the civic also misses the mark of Blackhawk's poetics; she believes in poetry that brings what's going on inside the poet out into the open. Though not explicitly identified as such, one of the poems in this volume could serve as her *ars poetica*.

“The Burn” focuses on a sycamore that burns from the inside. Blackhawk concludes the poem in a way that makes the observation metaphoric. “I cherished that burn. I did not try/to put it out but kept circling back—/months, years—to investigate the char” (29).

Instead of a dichotomy between personal and community-oriented poetry, more productive is a holistic view of the person and poet who is mindful of the self in relation to the world, wherever in the world she may be. Blackhawk’s work in *The Light Between* suggests she is attentive to all the places where she is and has been, and she employs a variety of poetic strategies to render time, place, and self with emotional depth.

The Light Between is divided into five sections, each with fewer than ten poems. The first section has only two poems, but it includes the longest poem in the book and one of the most powerful. “Medea—Garland of Fire,” presents Medea herself speaking in vivid terms to Jason of her desire for him: “The glare from your sword/dazed me, set my mind/babbling with visions” (5). But Jason’s infidelity turns all the passion and power she experienced in their love bitter. She vows and plots revenge. “I wander/from this last encounter obsessed with how best/to betray you. My fingers twist my hair into knots.” (10). This simple hand gesture is fraught with meaning and twisted emotion. Medea becomes who she was not.

I will put on a shawl
of smoke and haze. Drape myself
in the gray peace of the dove.
I will be, quietly, like ashes
concealing fire (13).

Though Blackhawk can imagine Medea’s transformation in elegantly stated terms of smoldering fury, she employs a less imperious tone and longer lines as she shifts in “Out of the Labyrinth,” the first poem of the second section, from myth to her own experience. Hers is not the world of the palace but of a rodeo that provides disturbing metaphors for her relationship:

I have seen a bull toss then try to gore its rider
before trotting away elegantly, delicately,
as if sniffing some distant air—as if sensing

smoke or whiffs of lies—the way yours
hung in the air between us those last days (17).

She hangs on to the marriage “as if to the brindled back” (19) of a bull, that precariously, never quite aware of “how much I denied” (18).

All the contained self-denial, however, seethes upward and outward. In “From the Roof,” Blackhawk recounts images from her dreams, and among them is “poison ivy/coming up through the floor” (23). “Ginkgo Autumn” interweaves observations of ginkgo trees with reflections on the marriage and the speaker’s sense of “going nowhere fast” (26). Though she cautions herself against making a connection between the trees and her relationship, the poem questions how it is that “from below us thermal/forces rise” (27) and moves on to a close look at their leaves, “the veins fanning out from the center, dividing//in twos” and concludes “I misspoke before. This has/everything to do with the Ginkgo” (28).

By the end of the second section, Blackhawk has worked through the frightful images of self-denial and recrimination. The failure of the marriage seems to have involved chance as well as someone’s fault, whether hers, her husband’s or their mothers. She imagines in “Wild Bird

Rescue in Key West” what renewal of the relationship might have happened had not the chance wind of the day meant the cancellation of a snorkeling trip. Thus reconsidering the past, she recalls also those summer times when husband, wife and son enjoyed the outdoors together. “So let us think again. Of crickets,/yes again—and luminous evenings—and the beauty/ of *again* again” (33). The repetition of “again” does not indicate being stuck in place but emphasizes the new turn of thought. The poem then ends with a summertime image of growth and renewal, “A buzzing fragrance of blossoms/and in every one of them a bee” (33).

The poems in the rest of the book seem more playful in form and language. Included is a sonnet, “The Hawk in Winter,” with fresh similes to describe the bird that “sits plump and stolid as a hefty fist” watching from its mount “midst/ the empty branches” (47). There is reciprocity in the concluding couplet, hawks on highways posts watching the human as the human watches the hawks. “Like feathered gargoyles from some distant age/wild wonders watch our daily pilgrimage” (47). The natural world is not prettified, nor is daily human life easy, but the choice of the word “pilgrimage” also suggests purpose and meaning. Another winter poem, “Winter Solstice, Rosedale Park” observes finches and concludes with an image drawn from the birds and suggests self-acceptance even when all the answers are not clear. “And Mind, dear fierce//feathered Mind—what will you find/ to hold onto?” (49).

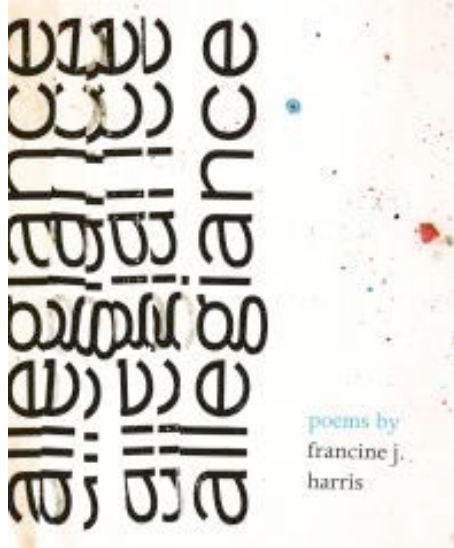
The alliteration in the title “The Lost Life List” encourages a light-hearted look at that list, and so the poem offers a counterpoint to Elizabeth Bishop’s view in “One Art” that the intent to be lost somehow inheres in things,

Nor did I lose the voices of men singing
as they fished in a foreign language—
and the boomboxes from picnic grounds
on the other side of the trees
seemed filled with the intent to be found (39-40).

The internal rhyme, assonance, and alliteration in “For the Mothers at Sundown” keep this poem moving in an upbeat way to its conclusion: “What better use of sorrow than make a blossom of it?” (41). Blackhawk has fun as well with the abecedarian poem “Possum Trot” and the word play of “Not Wafting, but Dofting” where the conclusion offers not just the possibility of making a blossom, but of having with language play a full bouquet: “Waft may carry the sweetness./Doft unfolds the bouquet” (79).

Terry Blackhawk is a keen observer especially of trees and birds and draws from her observations a sense of light unfolding in the natural world and in her life. Her special skills as a poet are in constructing tonal shifts, fresh similes and deeply perceived metaphors, and being attentive to the music in language, all of which give depth to her themes and give the reader many reasons to read, enjoy, and savor the poems in *The Light Between*.

Jonterri Gadson reviews *allegiance* by francine j. harris



allegiance
francine j. harris
Wayne State University Press, 2012

francine j. harris’ debut poetry collection, *allegiance*, elicits intrigue. The title calls to question the subject(s) of the collection’s allegiance. The table of contents in this 115 page book reveals there are more sections than usually found in poetry collections—twelve, each of them titled and only containing three to seven poems. Flipping through the pages creates an expectation of variety, as—with the exception of a few poems in unbroken prose blocks—no two poems in this collection are visually alike on the page and there are no capital letters. The initial uniqueness of *allegiance*’s structure lends to a sense of disorientation while inciting an eagerness to know what the poems within might bring into focus.

The first section, “jumping in,” opens with the collection’s only right justified poem, “sift.” It begins:

i am not all water
nor does the cue ball sink me
nor the cowboy rope me, nor the monk
sit through me.

i am a thousand faces at the bottom of the bottom’s gravel. the
sea-sharpened stones that clink and
soundlessly shift
make one.

As if anticipating questions, “sift” opens *allegiance* with self-declarations. This self categorizes itself while resisting being categorized as only one thing, a sentiment that resurfaces later in the collection in the poem, “one’s nature,” which ends: “*we would only say the box is a box. that’s*

what they do.” This speaker has no interest in being boxed in or categorized by this “they” that would not only impose its own narrow definitions on others, but would act as an example for others to do the same. The collection, itself, is difficult to classify--these poems don’t seek to be about one thing or to tell one story, again and again they demonstrate the complex nature of existing while resisting categorization.

Many of the poems in *allegiance* function as catalogs in a style similar to that which is most often attributed to Walt Whitman. The poems are not merely lists of objects, they are phrases that build upon each other, words that reconstruct worlds, they are invitations made of stark images and vivid details as in the poem “what you’d find buried in the dirt under charles f. kettering sr. high school”:

blood:
soaked and caked on white socks, on blue mesh net t-shirts.
the band leader’s blue baton and drumsticks.
matchbooks’ gnarled sulfur spilling over newport cigarette butts.
condoms in a few dull shades, tenth grade chemistry books
modeling atomic fatty acids.

The poem resists narrative by listing what was left behind rather than detailing what happened. This, too, is a form of proclamation, a way to say—this happened here, but not just this, but that and this too, to him, to her, we lived here, all of us, we really lived.

The last poem in the collection’s first section, “i live in detroit,” takes advantage of the structure of a ghazal to emphasize that here, in *allegiance*, is often Detroit. It begins:

she said i live in detroit. and there are no flowers in detroit.
so why would anyone in detroit write about flowers in detroit.

The poem opens like a challenge to the speaker--here’s something Detroit is not. The speaker responds:

like a lot of flowers, i have split my stem. cleaved into root balls. stuck to sweaty
bus windows, like so much dandelion, i get rinsed down shelter shower drains in detroit.

there are plenty of violets in flophouses, pistils broken open
on forty-ounce mouth lids making honeybees bastards in Detroit.

As if to say, beauty may not appear in a way that most are accustomed to, but that doesn’t mean beauty doesn’t live in Detroit. And, here, *allegiance*’s pledge comes into focus—to love, not blindly, but completely, with eyes wide open.

I’m most taken by the various ways that listing and cataloging function in these poems and how specificity colors them authentic, as in “eight days until your ashes turn one:”

count. there were hundreds of pills and the reek of heroin, enough particles for a drop a day, a slipped
afternoon, count them, high once—morning, once evening, tastes of gravy, reeks the same all night. smells
the counted nickels, gathered dollar bills, scooped motrin along razor blade edges. count. the days between
pall mall cigarettes, headaches, sex—did you? count those days. or count as the years ticked off where the
grass didn’t take. the garden—dust. our mother perched in her glasses. count

This poem faces absence by cataloging memories, sifts through and pulls out the most specific details and gives them away as invitations to enter the poem and the loss, and maybe not feel as alone there.

In the end, the mystery of the collection’s many sections is solved. Each of the section titles are pulled from the final poem in the collection, the title poem— “allegiance”—which is a list of the functions and characteristics of various angels (east side angel, detroit angel, city angel, for example):

a city angel will know where the river’s current means jumping in is really suicide. a detroit angel could tell you where you can use a public computer, an archangel could tell you where to find one all night.

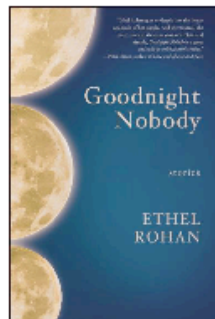
any angel would bring a new lexicon.

allegiance is made of many angels, ones who resist and remember, who harness the power of language to transform consciousness.

Goodnight Nobody

stories

ETHEL ROHAN



Ethel Rohan knows how to startle the dark. Her compassionate intensity illuminates the prose and the people of *Goodnight Nobody*—thirty short stories that are as sharp as they are earnest, luminous stories that reflect with sparse elegance our humanity and our often brokenness. As the moon circles the Earth, always separate but always drawn near, so too the cratered, alienated characters of *Goodnight Nobody* orbit others, striving to connect. By turns heartwarming and heartrending, this collection constellates ordinary lives gone wrong—the disgraced Dublin Reservist; the wife jealous of bees; the pyromaniacal mother craving warmth; the one-armed identical twin facing incompleteness; the photographer striving for the perfect image before losing her sight; and a host of others in trouble. Lives gone wrong, but always trying to get right.

Ethel Rohan was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland. Her first story collection *Cur Through the Bone* was longlisted for the 2010 Story Prize. She is also the author of the chapbook, *Hard to Say* (2011). Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *World Literature Today*, *Tin House Online*, *Sou'wester*, *Post Road Magazine*, and *The Rumpus*, among many other publications. She received her MFA from Mills College, CA, and is a reviewer for *New York Journal of Books* and a member of the San Francisco Writers' Grotto and PEN America. Visit her at ethelrohan.com.



Photo by John Cox

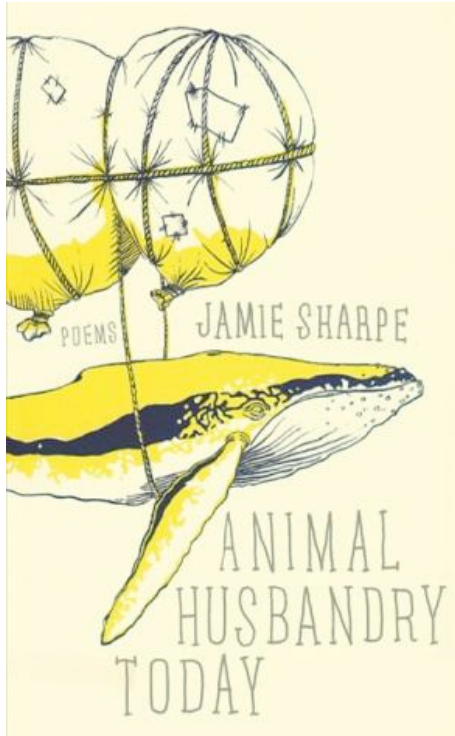
September 2013—978-1-938466-14-4—FICTION—136 PAGES—PAPERBACK—SPD—\$18.95



Queen's Ferry Press
8240 Preston Rd., Ste. 125-151
Plano, TX 75024
(972) 795-0951
www.queensferrypress.com

Contact: Erin McKnight, Publisher
publisher@queensferrypress.com

Emilie Esther-Ann Schnabel reviews *Animal Husbandry Today* by Jamie Sharpe



Animal Husbandry Today
Jamie Sharpe
ECW Press, 2012

Is humankind the creature, or the caretaker of this world? The debut collection of Canadian poet Jamie Sharpe, *Animal Husbandry Today*, prompts readers to ask themselves this question. A chaotic amalgam of experimental form and visual art, Sharpe's collection highlights the contradictions inherent in the modern human experience. Emotionally visceral, the collection addresses universal topics such as religion, sex, power and identity while making use of references to cultural and historical figures. Often switching from humorous to tragic in a moment, the collection could at times even be referred to as cheeky.

Sharpe, like the artists he mentions who include Rachmaninoff, Georges Braque, and John Cage, is not afraid to abandon traditional poetic forms. He employs formatting cues such as indentation to inform the content of his poems, and occasionally accompanies text with visual artwork. A particularly successful experimentation of Sharpe's is his deft use of side by side text, as in *Exquisite Body*. These poems are reminiscent of simultaneous dialogue in a play, where the accompanying line of text serves as a self-aware observation about the first:

The stone neck descending into crudely chiseled	The sculptor has no intent.
---	--------------------------------

steps.

The titles of Sharpe's pieces, occasionally written in Swedish, are often a clever punctuation to his poems. Some poems leave the title until the end in order to avoid informing the reading, and others verge on being puns. In *Glorierijke Onzin*, Sharpe—playing the part of the visual artist—is lauded with praise from art critics, "Although the delicate handling of the portraits reminds critics of Johannes Vermeer, Sharpe asserts, "stoned-rural, low-lying, pope-hell." Sharpe's response, easily categorized as drivel, is particularly acute because when translated the title means "glorious nonsense". In this way Sharpe is calling out the pretensions of the art critics, but also those of the artist. Sharpe's willingness to poke fun at not only himself but also the world he lives in is refreshing.

Sharpe also employs dramatic reversal frequently, as in the poem *Rated*. Sharpe begins "This poem is rated "*" for nudity/and a brief traumatic moment", and while the second stanza does describe a naked couple, the third stanza concludes with, "elsewhere a man, drunk off cough syrup,/is frozen against the steps of a school." This unexpected conclusion is made starker by its juxtaposition with the earlier picture of an aroused and nude couple. On a smaller scale, Sharpe's constant use of enjambment is another way he reverses expectations—each line changes the meaning of the one before it.

While the collection is accessible, some of Sharpe's work is so purposefully referential that some brushing up on history may be required by the reader in order to grasp the layered subtleties. For instance, in *Thoughts: Georges Braque*, this reflection on humanity and the identity of freedom may be written from the perspective of cubist artist Georges Braques, but also references the French politician Georges Couthon. Other notable figures who make an appearance include Tony Blair, Johannes Brahms and Nancy Reagan. Sharpe's references are not limited to people, binary code makes an appearance in one poem, and he includes two other pieces that are compiled completely of existing song titles.

Animal Husbandry Today is a self-aware commentary on the double-standards and struggles present in a modern life where technology, addiction, politics and sex seem to be the currency of the day. Reconciling that which is organic with that which is manufactured is a daily struggle, and Jamie Sharpe uses his expansion of poetic form to explore this dichotomy. Sharpe's self-aware writing can at first glance seem like an experiment in novelty, but when the time is taken to unpack Sharpe's cultural references, it becomes clear that Sharpe does nothing without purpose. Humorous and frank, *Animal Husbandry Today* combines cautionary tales with unveiled wit, and the end result is a smart and challenging commentary. The collection is not seamless by any means, but rather the bumps and jolts along the way become the unifying factor that ties this collection about the 21st-century human experience together.

Samantha Duncan Reviews **Alex Dimitrov's** poetry collection *Begging for It*

Begging for It



Alex Dimitrov

Begging for It
Alex Dimitrov
Four Way Books, 2013

In modern poetry, there is no shortage of vulnerability and confession, as countless young poets crave and achieve the spotlight for their emotional rants on love, family, work, sex, and the like. Few of them possess the artistic maturity to not dwell on their stories, and instead leave them on the page, as tactfully as Alex Dimitrov. *Begging for It* is Dimitrov's full-length debut, a candid, unapologetic narrative of his trials and tribulations with the self pity filtered out, making it one of this year's memorable collections.

Thematically, *Begging for It* navigates an impressive array of experiences. An immigrant from Bulgaria, Dimitrov has a refreshing lens on America that centers on how different his American reality is from the neatly packaged American Dream marketed to anyone, immigrant or not. The book opens with poems that express an unexpected emptiness that followed his family's move to America, his own parents and siblings having nothing to say to each other, even after learning English.

Dimitrov takes close note of happenings that perhaps go ignored as perceived norms by most Americans, as in the poem "American Youth," where he observes his father spending more time commuting to work than sleeping. The wait for his father to come home is weaved into his daily existence, as he sits outside watching the neighborhood kids play and "live out my American

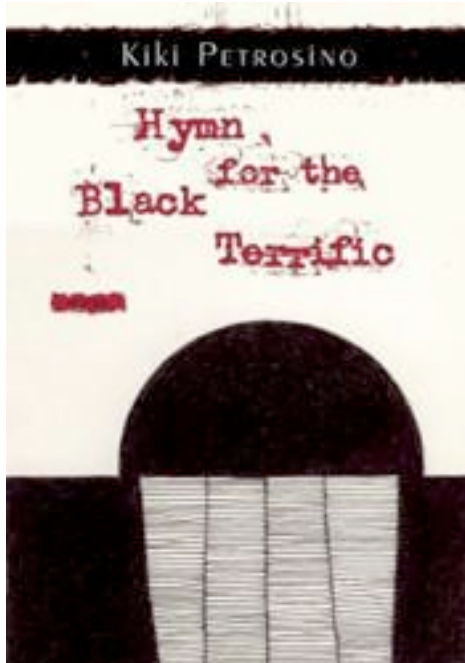
youth.” The lackluster routine discovered by those new to the culture is hard to overcome, even when Dimitrov can’t seem to fit into it in the first place.

Begging for It features many poems expressing not just an acceptance for life as it is, but a willingness to splash its reality across the page, seemingly in hopes of inspiring reflection among readers. In “To the Thirsty I Will Give Water,” Dimitrov insists, “We were given more than we can drown,” a line no reader can turn away from without examining the sum of parts of their own existence. He proclaims in “The Why,” “...how great it is to live and die on earth / even if it means having known nothing / of the why. Nothing of the why.” Through this topically diverse, yet cohesive collection, Dimitrov masterfully tells his personal story, while still keeping an eye on life’s bigger questions, compelling readers to be anything but unreceptive partakers of his work.

The color red recurs throughout much of Begging for It, in its predictable, paradoxical, symbolic forms (blood, love). In “Bloodletting,” Dimitrov references, “bad actors / in a black and white Fellini movie. / If you can’t show red, why bother filming?” as though red, and all it touches, is not just integral to a film, but to life itself. It suggests, why bother living without the full spectrum of experience and emotion knocking you to the floor, the way it inevitably will do?

Similarly, Dimitrov lives his own range of emotions openly, allowing the maturity of his art and understanding to speak of an imperfect life he has grown to love and not expect sympathy for (the title of the poem, “I’m Lonely and I Love It,” speaks for itself). Even more than his self acceptance, though, is a desire to share a piece of himself with readers by telling his story. In “21st Century Lover,” Dimitrov confronts the reader and asks, “What part of me can I give you to sell?” Following that is “I Will Be Loving,” in which he urgently promises, “I will degrade myself, reader. / For You. / I will be loving.” A generous writer who shares ownership of his experiences, Alex Dimitrov successfully draws together a raw and poignant set of poems in Begging for It, leaving readers enriched by his personal stories and larger questions about living.

Sing a Song of Darkness: Katherine Yets on *Hymn for the Black Terrific* by Kiki Petrosino



Hymn for the Black Terrific
Kiki Petrosino
Sarabande Books, 2013

“To be a poet is to surface plainly/ from the wound of sleep. To observe how thickly feathered/ the heart, how small & bright the planet of human thought,” Kiki Petrosino writes in her poem “Cygnus Cynus,” and after reading her collection *Hymn for the Black Terrific*, I believe she fits her own definition of what it is to be a poet. Her observations of the world around her break open the rib cage of truths and reveal what commonly goes unnoticed or is completely avoided. I love the lyrical darkness of her poetry, her blunt attack on bigotry, as well as the larger than life persona she creates.

In the first section “Oiseau Rebelle,” Petrosino does sing like a rebellious bird, using all the sound tools in poetic repertoire. Her sharp alliterations clash with her dark images. The word “dark” itself or a variation of it is used 20 times (give or take) throughout her collect and is in almost every poem in the first section—“Darkness is in.” Blade, black, knife, and other “dark” images can also be found multiple times throughout the collection, causing an echo throughout. Anaphora can be annoying (or is this a personal problem?), but Petrosino mixes up her repetition like the notes of a songbird. Such a pleasant, resounding tune can be found in the prose poem “The Terrible Test of Love,” “If you were scrimshaw, & this the Artic loop with miles to climb. If I had feet unslipperd and a knife. If, in busted crenellations of my teeth there kept a knife. Such knife there kept. Such colored *if*...” Reading aloud or even in silence, you can feel the cadence

of her words through your tongue, with voiced and voiceless stops jarring between smooth sounds—harsh alliteration between the hush. My personal favorite, which I feel gives the best glimpse of how Petrosino sings in her poetry, is the poem “Ragweed,”

Neither wax, nor egg, nor honey on the knife
In garden not, nor street nor bus nor bank—
Not sleep. Not word. Nor will-over-will
Not lung. Not hull, or sail. Just crank & tread

in place [no place] & white [not white] gets hot
& seethe & seethe—my sleep like steam
not long, but less. So less, till I am I who cracks
at last, begs *air* & says *Am I such root? Such rot*

for rage who scrapes, who darks each swatch of flesh
each branch of mesh & salt & bit? This rag—it rob
& sneak & rob & sneak, my tongue gets pins & pine & less
& less. Can run, but run gets gone. Can bellow, bellow

change. Only *most*, only *half*, & less & less get
here, get thick & stick. Not breath.

Petrosino weaves her racial identity into her poetry, reflecting on and beyond skin by creating poems around Thomas Jefferson’s prejudice: The italicized word(s) at the end of each line in the second section “Mulattress” come together to quote a line from Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. She turns the quote around on itself, making *they* or the Other the observer rather than the observed. She defines/redefines what her skin means; what it means to be a “mulattress,” which means a woman with one black parent and one white parent (Petrosino has an African American mother and an Italian American father). “No one *forgives/* me for sitting beside *them/* at lunch or for wearing a *very strong/* set of thighs. In this country, we’re all sad & *disagreeable/* to each other. Someone, open *a door/*,” she writes. She shoves everyday racism she experiences into the reader’s face, showing them that we are not so far from Jefferson’s time as we all think we are. She writes in another poem, “I didn’t know my color till *they/* called me by its dirty name: a coined *secreted/* in the body’s bank,” revealing how racism is learned and constructed, not something imbedded in our bones. Bigotry has not died; it has simply taken on a more concealed form, which is how I interpret Petrosino’s choice of putting Jefferson’s words in italics within her poems in this section.

I was a bit disappointed that none of the poems in Petrosino’s second section had titles. Yes, I understand it is a numbered series, but it does not have to be. The next section is all strung together with one topic, but those poems still are titled. The main reason I am peeved by this is because I really liked the titles in the first section—a few had me googling around for translations, which was quite fun. I am not sure why she chose to just number the poems in this section when each poem could stand alone; the reader does not have to read the series as a whole to understand what Petrosino is trying to get across.

The final section “Turn Back Your Head & There Is the Shore” is taken over by a persona dubbed “the eater.” In prose poem after prose poem the eater eats and eats; she is a glutton of all things edible, “Not by sailfish alone shall the eater live. This morning, she shuts herself in the galley & uses a flat knife to plate her own tongue in white fondant.” We follow the eater from dish to dish, desire to desire, revealing the eater to also be a glutton of lust or love, “Then, too, he

had reached into her robe, & she'd let it fall open to the spring air... It was difficult not to think of love as music in the mouth." The eater does not hold back, an impulsive id without a superego to stop it.

Nautical motifs— bridge deck mouth, moves like an ocean liner, hull-like chest— can be found to describe the eater; this woman is larger than life in a way or at least the speaker views her as such. But the eater is brought down to size when we see her reality, "The eater is lonely, so the eater eats." The reader cannot help but have empathy for the eater, despite being slightly appalled by her (not myself personally, but some people hate hedonists). The eater seeks pleasure through food as well as lust to dull her loneliness. We shadow the eater through her fit of depression, her "dark as drink" mind, as she tries to fill herself, "If this is what it takes to feel better, then the eater will feel something else." The eater might possibly have an eating disorder, compulsive bingeing, but the eater has no shame, so the reader does not feel sad for or repulsed by the eater, since they are inside the eater's mindset.

Kiki Petrosino sings a song of darkness in *Hymn for the Black Terrific*. It is quite obvious that she is well versed in her craft. She has a background that shows her love for language. After receiving her BA, Kiki Petrosino taught English and Latin at a private school. She then earned her graduate degrees from the University of Chicago and the Iowa Writer's Workshop, where she worked for five years as a Program Assistant of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. Today, Petrosino lives in Louisvella and teaches English and creative writing at the university. She also co-edits *Transom*, an independent online journal. She lives a life surrounded by writing, what a life to live! Her first poetry collection *Fort Red Border* (2009, Sarabande) will definitely be the next collection I purchase.

Help Me Solve a Mystery, Who is Who and Where are We?: Katherine Yets on **Carrie Olivia Adams' *Forty-One Jane Doe's***



Forty-One Jane Doe's
Carrie Olivia Adams
Ahsahta Press, 2013

While reading Carrie Olivia Adams' *Forty-One Jane Doe's* on a Greyhound bus to Minneapolis, many of the poems gave me chills with their brilliance and eery mystery and had me looking over my shoulder. I was on a mission to solve the story, becoming the persona dubbed “the detective” in the first section. Adams' poetry has strong images but leaves out some detail of who, where, and when, which kept me reading and wanting to know more. The first persona we meet, as I said, is “the detective,” who the reader spends the first few pages getting to know while she tries to solve a mystery as well as solve personal truths, and “Here's a hint.// The detective is accused of looking/ so much like someone/anyone else.// She has one of those faces.” Small clues form this persona and bring her to life on the page. Adams gives only a small bit away in her poems, keeping the reader guessing.

Other personas make an appearance in this collection, including Pandora writing to the Astronomer, the Scientist, the Aviator, and, of course, the forty-one Jane Does. Many, if not all, of these poems gave me chills for one reason or another— spooked or intrigued, I was not always sure. One poem in particular that made goosebumps creep up my arm and neck was in the “The Lives of the Forty-One Jane Doe's” section (a note: Adams does not title her poems in this

collection):

There are Janes for everyday.

And there are sometimes Janes.

There are Janes that are only noticed when they wear red.

“Hey, Red!”

“Red!”

The man on the corner calls out Jane by her dress. He doesn't know

she's a Jane.

You may have fucked a Jane and didn't know it.

“God damn,” you called.

And Jane answered.

If there were Forty-one Jane Doe's crowded in a graffitied bathroom stall—

They would all be dialing one number.

Chills. The last line leads me to a dark conclusion, sending shivers all through me. This poem is also a great example of how Adams sometimes plays with whitespace on a page, tabbing her lines to where they belong. When poets choose to do this, at times, the spacing feels random and out of place, but Adams makes her indents work with her lines rather than against (I do hope I did her indenting justice; I made them as close to the poem as I could). Her line breaks also play into the puzzle of her personas at times, pulling the reader off and back on the tracks of the margin. Each persona, like the detective, is a puzzle to be solved or has one to solve.

Adams' other section are not taken over by personas: “Technologies,” “Winter Came,” “Intermission with Strings,” and “Voice Made Small.” If I had to choose a favorite, it would be “Technologies,” mainly because in this section, she addresses the reader directly. She writes in one poem, “Reader, you and I have been lashed / by the weather.” She addresses the reader like this four times, and I do not think I have ever been directly addressed like this in a poem, assuming I am the reader, of course. This recognition made me feel more a part of each piece, like I was having a personal conversation with Adams. I kept thinking, *wow, how nice of her to include me*, which was possibly an overreaction as well as vain but either way, made me quite tickled. In one poem, she invites the reader to solve a mathematical equation; she asks, “Do you know mathematical beauty, reader?” and continues, “It ends: $+ 1 = 0$.” I know nothing of mathematical beauty, even though my best friend is a psychometrician. Adams invited me (personally) to check out this lovely number mess, though, so I tried to crack it. I failed. Luckily, Adams put her notes that this piece of an equation comes from Euler's identity theorem $e^{\pi i} + 1 = 0$, so I did not go crazy, racking my brain to figure this out.

In this same section, there is a “he” that comes in. Who the hell is he? He also appears in “Winter Came” along with a “you.” Is “he” and “you” the same person? I should not assume such things but do; I believe each he and you are meant to be one person. There is a small, somewhat tragic love story planted in this collection, just a few seeds here and there. Her intimacy with him is obvious, since in one section she is in bed with him, “And we were in bed,/ and I wanted to tell you;/ I opened my mouth to tell you./ And you were asleep/ so I waited some more in the winter/ my winter.” She writes, “he is distant / or has forgotten me [slash is not a line break],” which leads to the thought that the ending of this fragmented love tail is tragic. The ending possibly caused by the speaker (assumed to be Adams) depression, which is the winter she speaks of. This is yet another riddle weaved into her collection.

Forty-One Jane Does kept me guessing and second guessing where Adams' personas and other poems were leading to. I dare say I loved this collection for its mystery. Adams is a Chicago poet, who writes poems that are films and films that are poetry. Let me expand on this: she creates her own ekphrastic effect, letting visual art and written or spoken word play on and off each other. She started doing this about three years ago, saying in an interview with *Chicagoist*, "Film was a way for me to learn the visual and have something to go to when I was trying to write a poem." At first, she never planned to share these films with anyone; I am glad she changed her mind. With her book *Forty-one Jane Doe's* is a disc with three short films. In these films, she uses nature for "Pandora's Star Box", urban environments for "The Lives of the Forty-One Jane Doe's", and buildings, whole and dismantled, for "Winter Came," each with either her reading her poem(s) or having white noise or music with text breaking up the scenes. Her ekphrastics are exceptional, considering that they do what any ekphrastic piece strives for: stands alone. Her poetry has a life of its own outside of the films; the films are a bonus.

Pelekinesis

www.pelekinesis.com

If you buy a book
from Pelekinesis,
you own the
book.

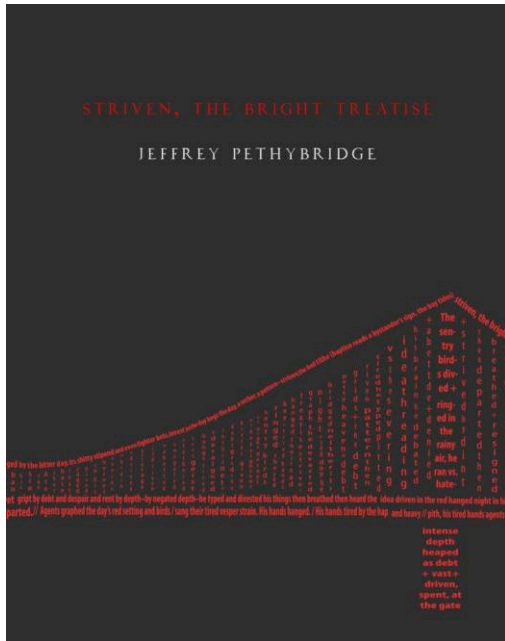


Buy a good book today.

PELEKINESIS 112 Harvard Avenue #65 Claremont, CA 91711
books@pelekinesis.com 909-784-1470 www.pelekinesis.com

Available online and at local bookstores. Wholesale pricing available.

The Poem is a Ritual that Conceals: C. Kubasta reviews Jeffrey Pethybridge's *Striven, the Bright Treatise*



Striven, the Bright Treatise
Jeffrey Pethybridge
Noemi Press, 2013

If one is a writer –a poet –and one feels called to write of the world –the whole of the world –to encapsulate life and loss and the interminable work of living and writing and feeling, is that task Sisyphean? Or promethean? Is it drudgery? Or pain? Or equal parts both? And if either, or both, why would one continue? Jeffrey Pethybridge's *Striven, The Bright Treatise* enacts this question, page after page, without resolution. Pethybridge himself, in an end note, identifies his collection as “a book of poems against my brother’s suicide” (179). And he begins with Sisyphus.

At the book’s heart is a mystery, suggested by the simple poem “[Bridge, you’re].” It exists simply on the page, juxtaposed with a blackened page: “Bridge, you’re / not so / beautiful / as not to / wear a / suicide- / barrier.” (33). It is the clearest, and most accessible text in the collection; paired with the “gargantuan” other texts in the collection, it points to an identity to be discovered, an answer hidden in text; but there is no literal answer. There is no “why” identified for the reader; there is only the incessant repetition of the suicide, of those who suicide. There is also no recompense from loss, even (especially) in work.

Dear Reader: Let me make it clear. I loved this book. But I am at a loss of how to say that – reading it was a strange kind of pleasure. The pleasure of a mystery that cannot be solved. The pleasure of treating text as hieroglyph, as palimpsest. Reading Pethybridge’s poems, I felt like

my best student self –seeking and finding the barest outline of a voice that both invites and rebuffs.

The voice of Pethybridge’s poems is layered, textured, nearly anagrammatic. It revisits image, language, and line obsessively, like the tongue that cannot resist the dry socket of a lost tooth, like the nail that cannot stop scratching a scab. The work is its own purpose, even if, as is “The Drug-Tired Duration / The Blaring Day” it signals its unfinished-ness. The work is a “sad gargantuan,” a “monstrous concentration.” Remembering the lost loved one is equally gargantuan, equally monstrous. But, the speaker’s voice admits: “(the truth is I know the truth is made through work: lucid and unsparing.)” (28).

We do come to know the basics: the brother, the bridge, the “fat hands,” the “drug-tired[ness].” We come to understand the references to music –through an included eulogy. We come to see the brother’s particular suicide foregrounded on a tapestry of suicides: soldiers (both modern and ancient), Dante’s allegory, the literal place of Aokigahara (where the search for suicides each spring is called “mushroom picking”), a fever-dream of a fasting scholar stuck in the mire of being loved, visual poems that map bridge jumpers. And at the end of the collection, there is resolution: a poem that falls on the page. Reconfigured, it’s is perhaps the clearest expression of the text.

The reading of these poems demands a lot of the reader. The reader may seek an end, a consolation, an authoritative voice to speak of loss with distance. But there is none; the experience of reading these poems is claustrophobic and hot, repetitive and hazy, tiring. It feels like grief; the reader inhabits the grief and wishes to escape it. There is no escape, except in the work.

Addressing the trees that are suicides in Dante’s wood:

...you the prisoner, you the plea, you the riot
of bone and voice [. . .] God is
both this grisly act, and the tourniquet
keeping your from bleeding-out... (64).

Later, the speaker’s voice relates a dream. He is remembering dreams, at the behest of his suicide survivor support group. These images return, but here he is the brother who has cut off his own hand; he makes his own tourniquet (106). The slippage between he and his brother is constant. The reliving of the moment on the bridge collapses the difference between their two bodies, their two consciousnesses. Perhaps that is why this quote from the journal of the starving scholar: “let this hunger strike remake the terms of my privation; may the terms be mine own & lasting” (91). This collection of poems is his own hunger strike –an attempt to eat only words, to roll a stone for no other reason than rolling a stone.

If the first few sections of the book seem Sisyphean, relentless and tiring to suggest obsessive grief, the later sections become promethean –we inhabit the body to feel its pain, to know that pain means we live. It is perhaps the only thing that assures us we live, and we know it through the hard work of feeling, without resolution. Pethybridge captures this perfectly in the opening line from “The New Humors (2)”:

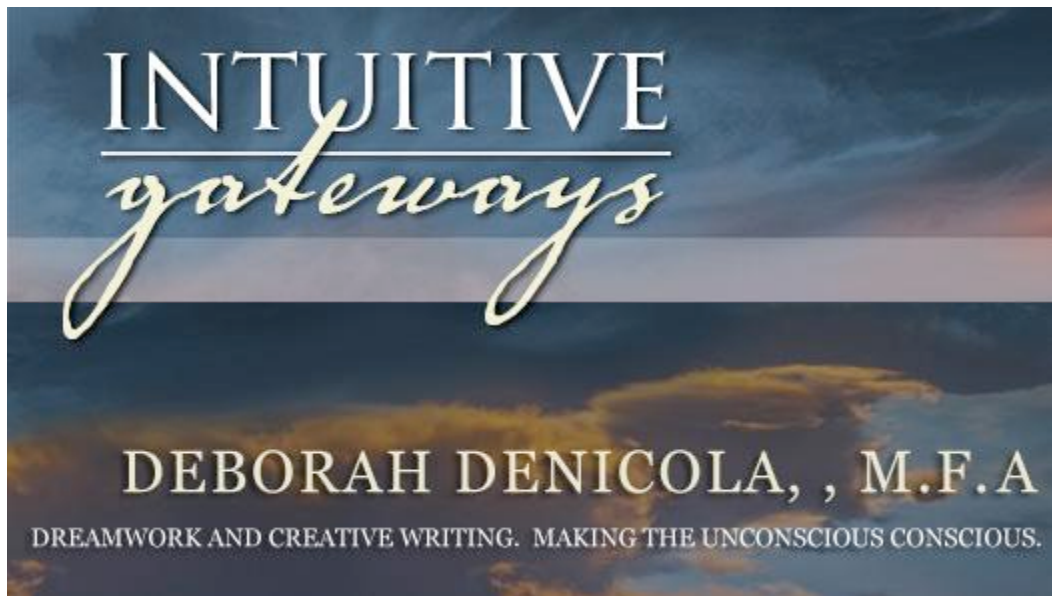
din a poem / poem an id (73)

Each of these poems is a din of voices, a din of one voice –obsessive, repetitive. Each poem is desire, instinct, the suicide tree that grows “like a spelt grain, surges, / as in stop-motion photographs, up from / seed to sapling to rash and wild plant.” (63). But the green is trimmed, by harpies maybe, by the death and memories of loved losses, by the “day [that] derives,” that “sparrows,” that “bridges.” When faced with that unrelenting day, all the poet can do is write – the poem remains the only impulse against the interminable day. But the Id will be conquered, controlled, sublimated. The poet proclaims “*the extraordinary flower of the ‘I’*”; the poem is the only action possible “against the November inside April.”

WRITING CONSULTATION

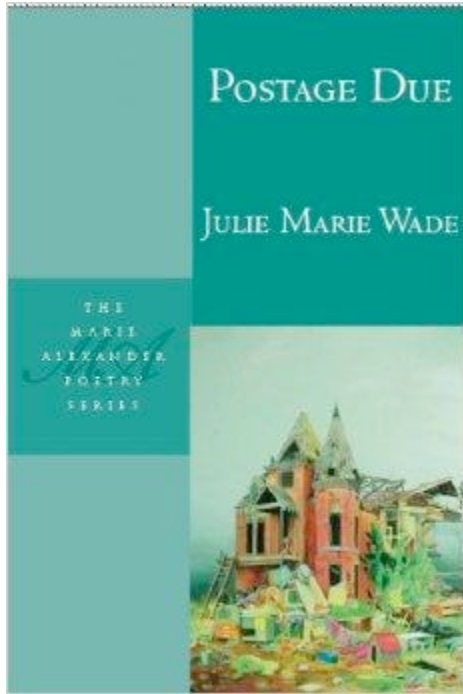
*Poetry *Memoir *Fiction *

Deborah@IntuitiveGateways.com



Deborah DeNicola is a NEA Awarded Author
Her work includes the Amazon Best-Selling Memoir
The Future That Brought Her Here
and five poetry collections, most recently,
Original Human

Acceptance Inside an Envelope: Katherine Yets reviews **Julie Marie Wade's** poetry collection *Postage Due*



Postage Due
Julie Marie Wade
White Pine Press, 2013

In Julie Marie Wade's poetry collection *Postage Due* she braids in parts of her personal life: mother issues, sexuality, love, unlove, childhood, religion, and much more. We get a glimpse of her reality; a reality many people can relate to: being unaccepted in various facets of life. In her work, there is also an undertone of regret for what went unsaid and a longing to uncover or recover the past.

Before looking deeper into the collection, let's talk about Wade. Wade received her MFA in poetry from the University of Pittsburgh, where many well established writers have gone. She received her PHD from the University of Louisville. Wade published her chapbook *Without* through Finishing Line Press in 2010, *Postage Due* through The Marie Alexander Poetry Series this past spring, and *When I Was Straight* will be published in 2014 through A Midsummer Night's Press. She does not only write poetry, though, she has also published two memoirs and a creative nonfiction chapbook. She has various other publications in Journals, which can be seen listed on her official website (www.juliemariewade.com). The Sunshine State is her home, along with her partner and their two cats, and she teaches creative writing at the Florida International University in Miami. Now, back to the collection.

Each section of her collection is labeled a Christian tradition: Lent, Pentecost, Advent, and Epiphany. The poems in each section fit directly or indirectly into their section theme. For example, in Lent the speaker (assumed to be Wade) does give apologies to people of her past (to name a few, her ex fiancé and a girl she hated in high school), which works with lent being a time of repentance, but she does not give anything up for lent, like most people do; instead, she uses this word as a prefix: ambivalent or “(Ambiva) Lent” as she calls one of her poems. This section is filled with mixed feelings from her past, and she indulges in these feelings as well as indulges in the things she had denied herself, that she had given up. One of her denials was her sexuality, and in the poem “Arthur Dimmesdale, Alone in the Closet with a Bloody Scourge,” the speaker gives into temptations of the flesh. “I had not so much as sniffed a woman,” the speaker says in the beginning of the poem, then gives in to what she understood as a sin, “I felt the Serpent himself attending: tongue piercing groin, dust filling my belly, that hunger is like no other seizing hold of my (once-iron) will.” She is beginning to indulge, but only slightly, flirting with temptations but feeling guilty. The speaker calls to her past self “Come out, come out, wherever you are!” in her poem “Fugue,” trying to bring her out of the past— her religious beliefs, her self-denial, her strive to impress her mother—and into her new identity (as well as possibly coaxing her old self out of the closet, so to speak). In her next section and those that follow, she does come out with a bang, but my reader, you will have to read to believe. I cannot give everything away!

Wade's collection as whole is eye catching with postcards weaved in at random, one at the beginning of the collection and then one per section. My favorite one, which she addresses to Pastor Gary Jensen, reads, “New Commandments:/ Thou shalt love thy lover’s body/ Thy shalt fuck they lover’s brains out/ Thou shalt not be ashamed of thy cunt nor thy heart.” I am now holding these commandments as my own. Her four other postcards are addressed to a girl she had a crush on in fifth grade, a well manicured woman who gave her a gift, her father, and her mother. Each fits snugly in its given section, fitting the theme. I cannot lie, some postcards were tear triggers for me, especially the one to her father, Bill W. which reads, “Dear Dad,// I saw a bumper sticker the other day for Alcoholics Anonymous. I had forgotten their slogan: “I'm a friend of Bill W.” And the irony was— wished I could be a friend of Bill W. too.” Each postcard opens up a new truth to the story being told through this collection and shows the speaker demanding or hoping for acceptance from people of her past.

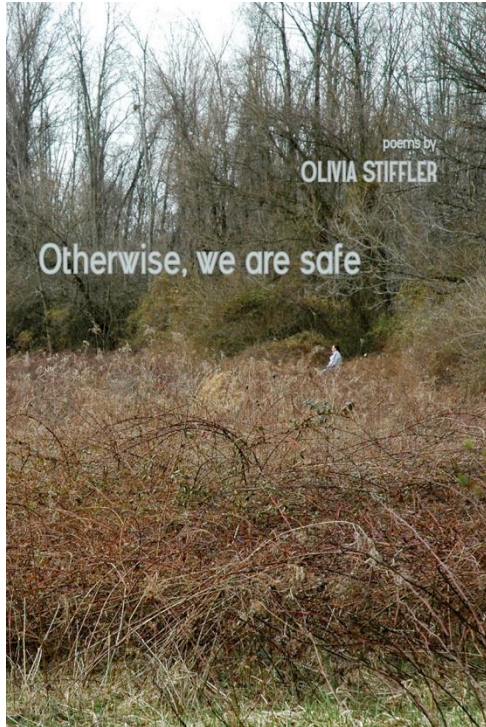
Wade also has letters in each section. She claims her letters are prose poems, writing in “The Note,” “this would be a poem about transgression & not regret; a poem about the courage we find...” I feel these “prose poems” step a bit too far into prose. I do realize there is a fine line between short memoirs and prose poetry, but some of the letters have gone too far; they seem like straight prose and should be labeled appropriately. I also would have liked it more if the prose poem letters in the Pentecost section were weaved into the verse poems, rather than being bulked at the end, because it felt a bit too taxing to trudge through. That being said, I love Wade’s letters.

In the letters of the Pentecost section, Wade gives the reader a crystal clear view into typical teen and young adult years—the confusion, the heartache, the questions, more confusion, and the awkwardness— and shows the reader unusual hoops in life that the speaker had to jump through

and not always make it. The speaker in Wade's pieces (assumed to be Wade) addresses celebrities: Laura Petrie, Mary Richards, and Mary Tyler Moore, comparing her life to theirs and asking pretty personal questions that made me giggle. Some of the questions she asked Mary Richards, which are personal favorites of mine, were: "Do you ever feel like there might be something wrong with you (not that there is) for being single so long?" and "But you've had sex, haven't you?" and "So, I guess I wondered if you had ever kissed a girl, or thought about kissing a girl—maybe even a friend—maybe Rhoda." The topics she brings up are things a girl around this age would/should be asking their mother (or older sister), but the speaker does not have such guidance. Her mother is a perfectionist, so the speaker is unable to be so vulnerable and ask such silly questions, which is shown in a letter written from the mother's perspective, "My Mother Attempts To Procure Me A Prom Date Through the JCPenny Catalog." In the mother's letter, there is an undertone of ridiculously high expectations for this young girl, making her shine to her possible prom date by speaking of her grades and educational activities—her daughter is "very, very accomplished." Through these letters, like the postcards, the reader gets a better picture of the speaker's past and present that is unable to be completely articulated in the [other] poems.

Wade's collection has themes strung throughout that many if not all people can relate to. I would like to believe that all genders could appreciate looking into the lives of women, but based on past experience, I am a bit skeptical now. I remember when I was teaching assisting in a Writing Studio, we had read some of Alison Townsend's work (she has also been published through The Marie Alexander Poetry Series, *The Blue Dress*), and students who identified as men said they could not relate to her work, because they are not women and do not experience such things. I will say this: I believe Wade's (as well as Townsend's) poetry collection paint a portrait of the female experience in a way everyone can relate to, even if they do not menstruate or go through other female dubbed experiences. I did read parts of her collection with a male friend, and he felt male bashed by a few of Wade's poems, especially "Hester Prynne & the Palinode of the Anti-Love" where it read "I wonder how it is that men can live with themselves, though it is plain to see women cannot live with them in any salubrious way." To this, all I have to say is: although I somewhat understand where you are coming from, if you feel this way, you are reading the poems all wrong. Wade's collection, like I said from the get go, shows how many people experience rejection or a lack of acceptance from all angles of life, and sadly, gender is one angle. This experience is universal, no matter what gender you identify with.

Olivia Stiffler's *Otherwise, We Are Safe* reviewed by Margaret Rozga



Otherwise, we are safe
Olivia Stiffler
Dos Madres Press, 2013

Olivia Stiffler immediately caught my attention with the title of her book. *Otherwise, we are safe* seems to offer reassurance, yet the “otherwise” in the commanding first position of the title raises doubts. I wondered how the promise of safety might balance out the implied dangers. I wondered what these poems would identify as needing to be cleared away to find safe space. Opening the book at random, I happened upon “Moving On,” a poem that turns a thought-provoking simile into deeper reflection: “Old friends bury me deep as a past life. / Enemies purge what they can without erasing themselves” (35). Who is this poet, I wondered, who is this woman, who are her friends, who her enemies and why; did she discover safety and if so, where and what else did she have to say about how entangled are the ways we become who we are.

I found in the book’s four sections a complex chronology from girlhood to grandmothering with flashbacks and flashes forward that convey a sense of the ways past and present intertwine. I found poems that show first a particularly unsafe past, an abusive childhood and unhappy marriage, and then the intrusion of time and mortality into even the later moments that seem most idyllic. Reading on brought the reward of the images Stiffler offers of the space left for safety: vivid though brief images of the garden, “blooming/bulbs and bushes and trees so

dazzling/they startle” (62) and images of the wild, “the spongy/quilt of pine needles, twigs,/ other leaves warming/the November swamp floor” (63).

The book begins with a poem whose title, “Shelter,” indicates safety, but the shelter is in the woods where copperheads and cottonmouths “hide in their own dark places.” The sister and brother who build themselves a make-shift refuge here are untroubled by the snakes and peaceful in their play:

Not once during our busy day
does my brother raise his voice to me,
though our father’s words hammering our mother
must echo in his head.

Even as evening approaches and they grow hungry, they do not hurry to their “real home” where a metaphoric snake is the dominant presence: “a thick black belt / coils around our father’s waist, / ready with its hiss and bite and sting” (1).

The second poem moves into a more recent time to present the mother, the woman whom Stiffler calls in the book’s dedication “the first love of my life.” The affection between mother and daughter is palpable in the long moment when the daughter agonizes over how to respond to her dying mother’s question, “What if there is nothing else?” Neither comfortable, reassuring words the daughter doesn’t believe nor the “chorus of my disbelief” will honor this moment. “Words hide. Time hangs a noose above my head. / To avoid being her Judas, I would bargain / with anybody’s devil from anybody’s hell.” (2).

Other poems in the first section reflect on the mother’s death and her life from the various perspectives of the daughter’s immediate grief and later reflections. She identifies her mother with the garden and flowers, especially the hydrangea the mother tended, but given distance in time wonders if her mother were not more emotionally complex than she had imagined. “Now I wonder if she hated that plant the way I did/or if she spent her last hours hating anything at all” (8). The first section of the book closes with “Love Tap,” a poem focused on an ambiguous “she,” perhaps the daughter, perhaps the mother, who feels her emotional life dry up. “She has turned off the spigot/that poured out love, allowed the handle/ that set it gushing to rust” (16).

The poems in the second section focus on various ways the young impulse to love dries up. There is the man in the powerfully spare poem “Paper Doll” who “thinks that I’m a paper doll/and cuts my life out along the dotted lines” (19). There is Sister Mary Eustace at St. Ambrose who tells children preparing for First Communion “to pray/for sainthood” and so the girl does. What she really wanted to ask for at her moment of powerful prayer is a bicycle. Her prayer for sainthood is answered with a thirty-two year marriage before she finally finds herself “in the throes of a divorce” and remembers “that I could have had a bicycle” (29).

The poems in the second half of the book find safer spaces. Finished with “slogging chores,” the poet takes up the work she’s longed to do, writing. This is her “Change of Life.” Though words need her prompting and perseverance to emerge, she invests the energy until she is “firing words like bricks in a kiln,/approaching a literary Big Bang, /becoming who I dreamed.” (41). Other poems convey a sense of the confidence, the safety, this identity as writer gives. “Poems Old and New” asserts a clear and positive goal. “My new poems will keep/no secrets. They will glitter with novelty/and shiver with righteousness./And they will be heard” (33). The prose poem

“Murder Mystery” presents writing as a way to “[s]peak /for the little girls who have no words to trump the fleshy memoirs of their/ miserable fathers” (34). Powerful though they are, words do not keep us completely safe. In “Nature Trail,” this mixture of the safe and the dangerous combines and yields the phrase that becomes the book’s title. Dangers are seen in the distance or hidden from view,

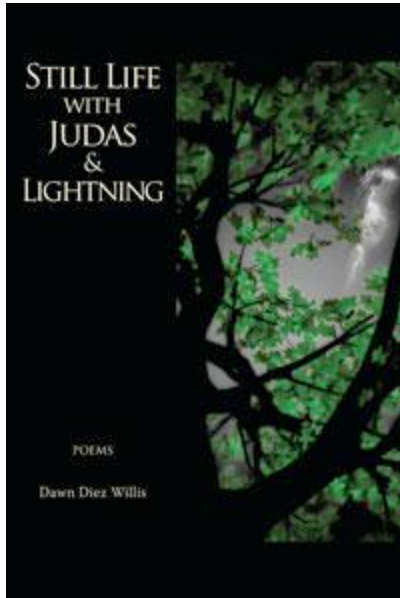
Like the copperheads hidden in the piles of rush
and under the gold-leaf rubble of the trees,
Time unravels around us.
Otherwise, we are safe
here in the fractured sunlight.” (38)

Poems that depict successful love also delineate the contours of safety. In “Wake-Up Call” the woman rests in bed while “someone else I love” is the kitchen fixing breakfast (43). Even in their moments of “Discord,” the speaker feels a close bond so that she cannot help but wish “we had met sooner, melded better, made/ children who would love us or not” (39). If in that moment of discord she envies deer who bound through the woods without fear of falling, she also experiences transcendent moments and describes the impact of those moments with an eloquent simplicity. “Sometimes we are one” (55).

Still there is no safety from the passing of time, as we see in the bittersweet farewell the grandchild bids her grandmother, “When I’m back at school and busy/ with my friends, I will forget about you,” an innocent child’s remark that leaves the speaker aware of “how the present collapses/and yesterday steps aside/to make room for tomorrow.” (64)

A woman, girl, young bride, young mother, writer, Midwesterner turned Southerner, at home, homesick, making a home, finding a home—all are rendered poetically in *Otherwise, we are safe*. Even at home, the poems say, we may not be safe. The death of a seven year old, apparently a grand-niece, in “Forever Seven” or a poignant note from a grandchild arrives from outside and leaves the poet feeling like an outsider, the forgotten one, (37). The past life though dormant never entirely vanishes. Our lives are tangled. The devil “knows the tides will never wash away / the footprint of my past, that even in Paradise/I cannot grow a brand-new soul.” (36). It cannot be otherwise.

STILL LIFE WITH JUDAS & LIGHTNING



Following “the caravan of mystery” through the point of view of many characters, Dawn Diez Willis’s first collection enacts a pilgrimage into many voices. Ruminating on an everyday darkness, these poems lean toward the light within the fierce vitality of existence. With musical lushness and deeply felt images, *Still Life with Judas & Lightning* unfolds like a peony, the lives like petals forming a single experience of complex beauty.

Paperback: \$15

ISBN: 978-0-9821066-8-6

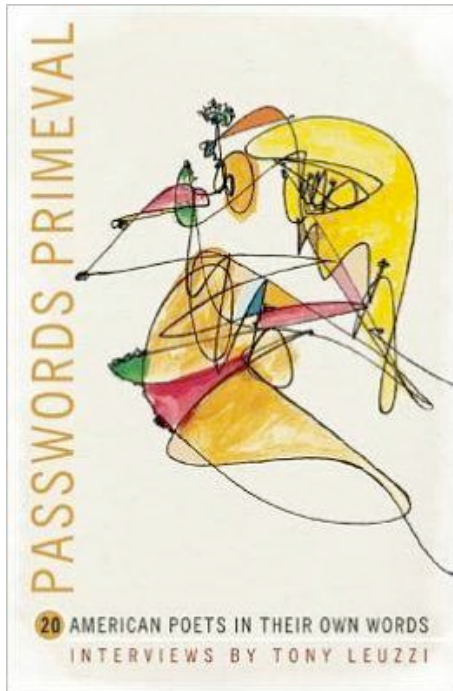
Dawn Diez Willis holds an MFA from the University of Oregon, and her poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Southern Poetry Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Dogwood*. An Oregon literary Arts Fellow, she teaches poetry residencies through Salem Art Association and is the editor of the OSPOA’s *Trooper News*. The recipient of an Oregon Literary Fellowship, she was a co-founder of an arts journal for incarcerated youth, *Through Our Eyes*. She lives in Salem, Oregon, with her husband and two children. For more information, please visit her website at www.dawndiezwillis.com.



Praise for *Still Life with Judas & Lightning*

“A smile is a scattering of gulls and palm trees cut the sky with silhouettes. These are just a few of the many images in Dawn Diez Willis’s *Still Life with Judas & Lightning* that will literally steal your breath. You’ll find here the seething distance of an observer give way to cherished truths, more revealing than any confession. Here are the utterances that make the knowable an intimate encounter with the unknowable.” —Major Jackson, author of *Holding Company*

Twenty Poets Talking: Robert Archambeau reviews the anthology *Password Primeval*



Passwords Primeval: 20 American Poets in their Own Words
Tony Leuzzi, editor
BOA Editions, 2012

“Don’t tell me what the poets are doing, don’t tell me that they’re talking tough,” sang the Tragically Hip back in 1998, “don’t tell me that they’re anti-social, somehow not anti-social enough.” Editor and interviewer Tony Leuzzi has certainly managed to get the poets talking in *Passwords Primeval*: the transcripts of his interviews with twenty very different poets, taken together, run to close to 350 pages. The book is most likely to be dipped into rather than read straight through: one imagines its destiny involving resting on library shelves until people interested in the work of a particular poet pluck it down to read that poet’s contribution. But one of the most interesting things to emerge when one does read all twenty interviews back-to-back is the lack of anti-social attitudes among the poets. Most of them seem to speak out of, and to, defined communities, the sum of which make up the varied, fragmented, and (despite reports to the contrary) extensive readership of contemporary American poetry.

Leuzzi’s interview with Kevin Killian shows the clearest case of a poet speaking to, and for, a particular community. Some of Killian’s community orientation shows through in his choice of pronouns: “We wanted to infuse our lives with the rigors of theoretical discourse,” he’ll say, or “I think all of us in the New Narrative [movement] approached the idea of being in a movement,

of working collectively, with various degrees of seriousness.” It’s *we* and *us* with Killian—with the collective pronouns referring to a group of writers and artists associated with the New Narrative movement which sought to bring poststructural theory and autobiography close together. The movement has very particular time/space co-ordinates: one feels, reading the interview, how very formative the San Francisco of the 1980s was for Killian and his associates. This was ground zero for the AIDS epidemic, and a time of great personal pain for Killian, who watched helplessly as friend after friend succumbed to the plague. “Every time I tried to write something it sounded ridiculous—hokey, sentimental,” he says. “It seemed the enormity of the crisis dwarfed any individual response.” On the suggestion of Kathy Acker, he began to use existing cultural artifacts—initially the films of Dario Argento—as a means to address the crisis, writing through them and treating them as if they were allegories of the epidemic. The resulting surrealism became, at last, a form befitting the tragedy of the epidemic: in Killian’s words, it “corresponded to the surrealism we lived through in the 80s and 90s.” Some of the comfort Killian felt in this form of writing came from the way it released him from his own conscious writerly will and allowed the poem to come forth from the encounter with another artist’s material: indeed, Killian’s poetics are clearly those of a writer who seeks to put the controlling intelligence in abeyance. Hence comes Killian’s love of Jack Spicer, who liked to think of poems as alien transmissions coming to him from space, and hence comes Killian’s statement that many of his poems “unrolled from a place outside my own will.” The impulse for Killian’s work clearly comes from the deeply felt needs of a man caught in the midst of a terrible disaster, and he writes very much for the benefit of people in the same circumstance: the goal he and his friends had, he says, was “to write for a whole, if limited, community, ourselves and our friends and lovers, and one or two benighted souls we imagined actually needed us in the hinterlands.”

It is to Leuzzi’s credit that his collection of interviews includes an experimental, often underground or alternative press poet like Killian along with former poet laureate Billy Collins, perhaps the best-selling American poet of our time. Collins readily acknowledges the many different readerships for American poetry, noting that he and John Ashbery “draw on very different audiences” and that “it’s not like I’m taking readers away from him, or that he’s taking readers away from me.” The audience Collins reaches is often one that lies outside the considerable one made up of other poets: when Collins tells us that he “is not predisposed to be interested in the psychic misery of the poet.... Who would be?” he reveals an orientation toward a very different community than the one that animates the work of Kevin Killian. Where Killian writes from and for an artistic and literary scene, Collins pitches his work toward a larger community, one we might find in any of the affluent American suburbs where copies of *The New Yorker* grace the coffee tables. While this audience might be considered more mainstream than Killian’s by any number of standards, it is not an audience with which we readily associate poetry. When Collins reflects on his early interest in poetry we see the tension between the modern (and, behind that, the Romantic) notion of the poet-as-outsider and Collins’ sense of himself as belonging to a broader community:

Ever since I came across a picture of Edgar Allan Poe when I was an adolescent, I wanted to be a poet. I’d never seen anyone who looked like that in my life! My parents didn’t look like that, that’s for sure. It suggested there was a realm inhabited by people completely different from the ones around me, that is, middle-class, suburban people. I wanted to be with them, find out who they were.

So far, we seem to be in the realm of Stephen Dedalus or a thousand other young men dreaming of escaping from a dull bourgeois life into the world of art. But there’s a twist:

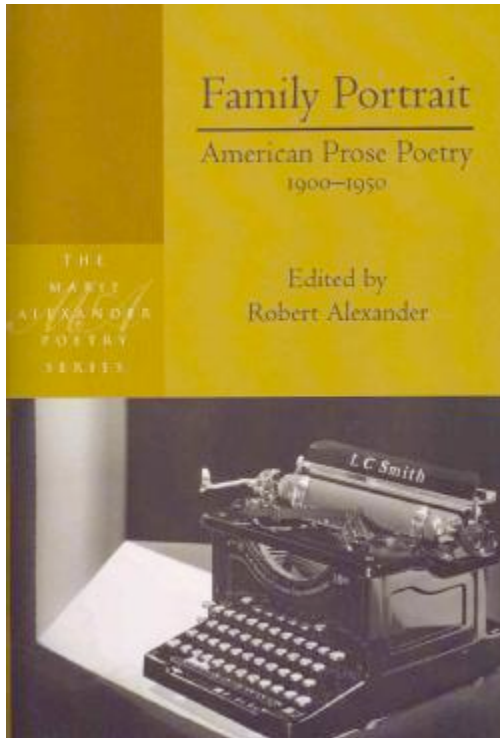
But, as a poet, I was sort of hobbled by doubt, so I didn't run with the pack. I didn't go to poetry readings very much; I didn't go out with poets; I've never taken a workshop.

The struggle, for Collins, was that of how to write for a bourgeois audience in a form that has by-and-large become dissociated from that audience. More than any other American poet of his generation, he has found a way to do just that by the use of humor, striking metaphor, and by (as he puts it) "simple diction" and "predictable" line breaks. We couldn't be much farther than the world of Dario Argento pastiche that animates Kevin Killian's work and speaks to his community. What Collins and Killian have in common, though, is the quest—ultimately successful—to connect with the community that matters to them.

No discussion of contemporary American poetry and its communities in our time would be complete without the mention of that 400 pound gorilla sitting at the poets' table, the creative writing industry. Much-maligned, often by the very people who devote a great deal of time and money to gain their M.F.A. degrees, the world of the creative writing programs has nevertheless provided livings for many poets, as well as a context in which their works are read and appreciated. When we read Leuzzi's interview with Karen Volkman, we also get a sense of how the world of the creative writing programs has had an influence on the creation of poetry. Volkman, who teaches in the prestigious M.F.A. program at the University of Montana, describes the genesis of her series of elliptical sonnets as part of her teaching process, coming about when she "started reading sonnets in preparation for a forms class I was scheduled to teach." Just as we can see the qualities of Killian's or Collins' work as things rooted in the particular communities to which they speak, so also can we see Volkman's formal concerns as connected to the poetry/academe nexus at which she and I (and, quite probably, you) dwell. While Killian's poetry sought a way to reflect on the crisis of AIDS in San Francisco and Collins' poetry worked to connect with a suburban readership, Volkman's poetry, in foregrounding the elliptical, connects with communities that come to poetry for language and its ambiguities. Indeed, many of her lines can, she says, be read as "propositions for a poetics" and she is wary of the kind of reduction of language to statement that a poet like Collins courts, worrying that "putting the borders of particular reference" on poems "is a kind of violence." This love of poetry for its polysemous multiplicity of meaning and its irreducibility to paraphrase has animated professors of poetry at least since the days of the New Criticism, and animates us still—Volkman even describes herself speaking to her students about how she's been reading a certain poem for years and how she is "still not sure what to make of it." Clearly Volkman loves this sort of ambiguity in poetry, and introduces it to a community of students and colleagues in many ways, including through her own works.

Leuzzi's other interviewees include Michael Waters, Gary Young, Dorianne Laux, Gary Soto, Patricia Smith, Scott Cairns, Jane Hirschfield, Martín Espada, Gerald Stern, Nathalie Handal, Stephen Dobyns, Dara Wier, Bin Ramke, Mark Doty, Carol Frost, Robert Glück, and Arthur Sze. His methods involve both written and oral conversation, with the poets given the chance to revise the transcripts in consultation with the editor. The effect is in many ways impressive, combining the feel of spontaneity with a level of detail and consideration more often found in essays than in interviews. The method does give something like the effect of an authorized biography, though: there are no moments when the poets seem as if they have been taken off guard. This, itself, speaks of a kind of civility on Leuzzi's part, a civility that has enabled him to travel comfortably to many different corners of the far-flung American poetry scene.

Channeling the Prose Poem's Ancestry: Steven Wingate reviews the anthology *Family Portrait: American Prose Poetry 1900–1950*



Family Portrait: American Prose Poetry 1900-1950
Edited by Robert Alexander
White Pine Press, 2012

Family Portrait, edited by Robert Alexander, is a must-read book for American prose poets and those who seek to study and understand the genre's tradition and reach in the country. This is particularly true because of the myth that it emphatically busts: that prose poetry is of predominantly European lineage, the spawn of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs de Mal* (1846) imported into America in the 1970s through academic circles. The prose poem's history in America is vastly more rich than I had known before picking up this book. Though examining the work anthologized is important to an understanding of the book, I'd like to spend a good chunk of this review examining the way its contents are presented—since a primary purpose of historical anthologies such as this is contextualization and the retroactive establishment of a canon and a tradition.

The introduction to *Family Portrait*, by Margueritte S. Murphy, takes on a broad evaluation of the form's history and circumstances. While acknowledging the seminal role of Baudelaire, she primarily frames prose poetry as a transcontinental movement rooted in fin de siècle modernism and intensely connected to the “little magazine” movement, as well as to “high modernist”

figures like William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and T.S. Eliot—all represented in the book. The nascent form was a perfectly shaped tool for exploring modernist concerns. The modernist era, which reached its apogee in the years immediately following World War I, concerned itself a great deal with the act of seeing and the fragmentation of perspective. (See for example seminal works such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, which delight in their own multiplicity.)

This spirit, Murphy argues, both gave rise to the environment in which the prose poem arose and served as a primary influence on the form’s development. (This same concern for fragmentation of perspective would later bring us metafiction and postmodernism.) Likewise, she stresses the modernist precept that, rather than meaning being something to be represented in our literature, the act of searching for meaning in itself becomes a tale worth telling. At its root, the prose poem is the trace of our search for that meaning—as direct as we can make it, unadorned, trying to give the experience to the reader as straight as possible.

Murphy also notes modernism’s concern for capturing the moment and recognizing it as worthy of our aesthetic interest, regardless of how disconnected it may be from a coherent narrative. Though poetry has always embraced the moment, it was a seismic shift during the Golden Age of the novel for prose to embrace it in the way prose poets did. Murphy further argues that the America of this era, a nation of immigrants being shaped by the noisy forces of urbanization and the automobile, contributed to the development of prose poetry through its particular openness to the changing verbal music of a pluralistic society. “The prose poem,” she contests, “affords transcription of the full music of speech” (27) in a way that opens up its tonal possibilities.

Thus introduced by Murphy, the works in this alphabetically-arranged anthology gain the familial relationship that the title promises. But as with any family, those relationships are sometimes tenuous. As can be expected from an anthology that attempts to describe a historical movement, *Family Portrait* suffers from a tension between two opposing forces: the “big tent” impulse, which seeks to include many participants in the movement, and the desire to precisely establish a canon and delineate the essence of a genre’s identity.

In the big tent spirit, Alexander calls in some heavy hitters in the service of prose poetry in addition to the four mentioned above: Sherwood Anderson, Paul Bowles, E.E. Cummings, William Faulkner, H.D., Laura Riding Jackson, Amy Lowell, Jean Toomer, Thornton Wilder, and others. Unfortunately, the contributions of these big names don’t always represent the spirit we have come to recognize as driving prose poetry. This is particularly true with work that feels a great deal more like flash fiction than prose poetry.

Although there’s certainly a clear link between the two forms, and an extremely fertile cusp—as Alexander ably discusses in his afterword—not everything that could be contained in either of these two subsets can reasonably be discussed as both. Some works are more prose poem-y, and others are more flash fiction-y, and we should not be swayed critically by the close relationship between the forms. Sometimes *Family Portrait* dilutes its energy by trying too hard to embrace flash fiction. Contributions from Faulkner (particularly “Frankie and Johnny”), Anderson (particularly “Sisters”), Jackson, and Toomer, for instance, feel not like moment-driven explorations at all but like traditional fiction writ miniature, with a clear concern for character

development that is virtually a stranger to prose poetry. At times I found myself feeling that the quality of the anthology suffered to make room for more people in the tent.

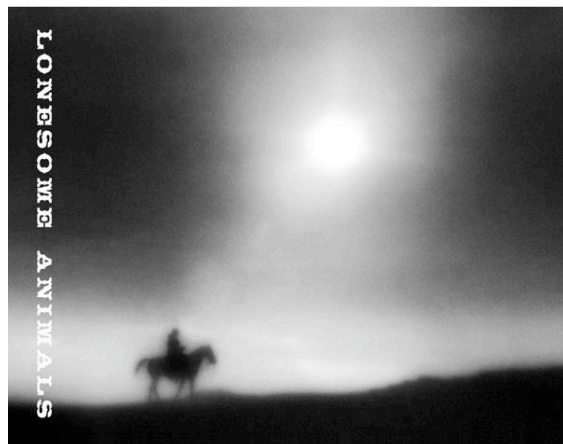
This was thankfully not always the case, and some of the heavy hitters represent the form extremely well. Stein and Williams belong in, and deserve to stand near the center of, any conversations about the American prose poem; they are well represented here, respectively, by excerpts from *Tender Buttons* (1914) and *Kora in Hell* (1917). Kenneth Patchen, though later historically, also earns his space the book's pages. H.D., Cummings, and Amy Lowell are other big names who make strong contributions which display the linguistic playfulness and idiosyncratic perspectives that have come, decades after such authors laid the groundwork, to delineate the prose poem's aesthetic territory.

There were also many discoveries for me in *Family Portrait*. Holly Beye was especially adept at capturing flux-ish stares of being ("Where hand-in-hand overthrew the telephoned-cold and a mother's greed," 64). Harry Crosby's work presaged contemporary prose poetry's fixation on throwing open all possibilities with near-outlandish first lines ("I have invited our little seamstress to take her thread and needle and sew our two mouths together," 89). Robert Duncan used a reflective, near-academic mode that showed the prose poem's early ability to absorb what we would later call creative nonfiction ("One exchanges the empire of one's desires for the anarchy of pleasures," 111). Charles Henri Ford, Jane Heap, Robert McAlmon, and David Alden Sanborn likewise struck me as poets to seek out and explore.

Robert Alexander's afterword also bears mentioning. He does an excellent job of tracking the prose poem's history in America, right down to Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882) and William Carlos Williams' observation on the difficulty using iambic pentameter to capture American speech (234). He articulately discusses the prose poem from the reader's perspective, explaining how in the form, "the reader is taking cues from the text to determine where it belongs in the universe of literature" (246). Not to be overlooked are Alexander's fine contributor notes, which weave together the history of, influences on, and connections between the authors. It is, in itself, an invaluable resource on the prose poem and its early practitioners.

Among the gems in the afterword is a quote from Karl Shapiro about working in the prose poem form: "I wanted to be as personal as I liked, as autobiographical when I felt like it, editorializing or pompous, in short, to be able to drop into any intensity of language at any time" (230). *Family Portrait* succeeds because it gives us a sense of this full range of the prose poem's stylistic and strategic arsenal, and selects them from a time before the form was even recognizable. While it is not a perfect anthology, it is a necessary one. Now that it's on my shelves, I will always know where to find it whenever I feel the desire to dig around in the tradition—an unexpectedly rich one, as this book tells us—of a form I hold dear.

James Wharton reviews Bruce Holbert's novel Lonesome Animals



BRUCE HOLBERT

LONESOME ANIMALS

BRUCE HOLBERT



Lonesome Animals
Bruce Holbert
Counterpoint, 2012

The iconic 1950's movie *Shane* opens with the de rigeur panoramic backdrop of breathtaking western scenery, an appropriate setting for the clean-shaven, stylishly dressed hero of that era. That was something of an evolution from 1930's and 40's cowboy cinema with lesser emphasis on scenery and when white horses and white hats designated "good guys." The evolution continued in the latter decades of the last century when the pretty scenery went away and both good guys and bad guys donned long, dark coats. That wardrobe bombshell and the equally unsettling development of the new age hero as unshaven severely jolted the sensibilities of the western movie cinephile.

Western movies, however, are deceptive on two basic levels. The beautiful southwestern desert scenery belies the deadly nature of the land and the hero's wardrobe disguises his true character. The deserts are devoid of life-giving water and crawling with venomous creatures while the heroes must be killers rather than impossibly pure knights in shining armor. Enter Russell Strawl, a latter day western lawman and main character in Bruce Holbert's *Lonesome Animals*. Strawl is tasked with tracking down a murderer in Oregon in the 1930's, but he is not the stereotypical good guy in any sense or setting. He is instead a driven, pragmatic hunter of men who goes about his vocation with lethal efficiency.

While he more closely resembles the dark, unshaven new age lawman than the clean-cut hero of the earlier western genre, he can hardly be placed in either mundane category, or perhaps any category. He defies type-casting as the flawed good guy who is trying to do the right thing. The question is whether he actually is the good guy. At best, he is ambivalent, a man who will bring the bad guy to justice, even if it's his own version sans judge and jury. Strawl is brutal and unforgiving, a man who is difficult to like. He is Clint Eastwood's *High Plains Drifter* on steroids. Empathy is not a word that comes to mind when considering Russell Strawl.

Lonesome Animals is shocking and appalling, a cruel wake-up call to the actuality of the real west, albeit in the more modern time. It is the way it was, but still is in 1930's Oregon. Atmospheric and violent, *Lonesome Animals* echoes Charles Portis' True Grit with dialogue that is precise and deadly economical. The characters are hard, no-nonsense people born of their remoteness and the rugged land from which they scrape a living. Conscience has taken leave here and men do what must be done.

The story is well told and exceptionally well written, and despite the raw, often unlikable characters, proceeds with a satisfying cadence and offers abundant mystery to engage and hold the reader. A formidable book to describe, a second reading would not make it any easier nor less enjoyable. Suffice to say *Lonesome Animals* is compelling and exciting and has a singular magnetism that draws in the reader and demands she not put the book down.



Original Human

Poems by Deborah DeNicola

This is lush and generous book, a stirring of myth and childhood always coming home to the flesh. A Gnostic Mary and a young girl on a swing are at home in the same dream space. Deborah DeNicola has written her richest book, and one to get delightfully lost in.

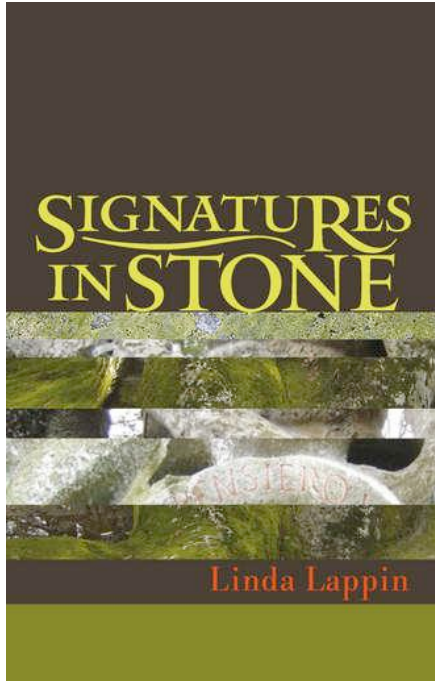
—Doug Anderson

In language that is both stunning and devastating, these poems enact journeys between earth's shore and the shore of the infinite world, and back again. With heart and with courage they remind us that all we have is our naked selves, that love and loss are to be equally honored: "You can't lose or refuse what's yours."

—Maragaret Lloyd

Read Sample Poems & Purchase *Original Human* at
[http://www.intuitivegateways.com/books_human_orig
inal.shtml](http://www.intuitivegateways.com/books_human_original.shtml)

Shaina Mugan Reviews **Linda Lappin's Signatures in Stone**



Signatures in Stone
Linda Lappin
Caravel Mystery Books, 2013

Signatures: (n) that which “we are constantly immersed in... forming a network of signs and symbols whose meaning eludes us, but which, if only we could read them, would reveal every detail of our past and even predict our future.”

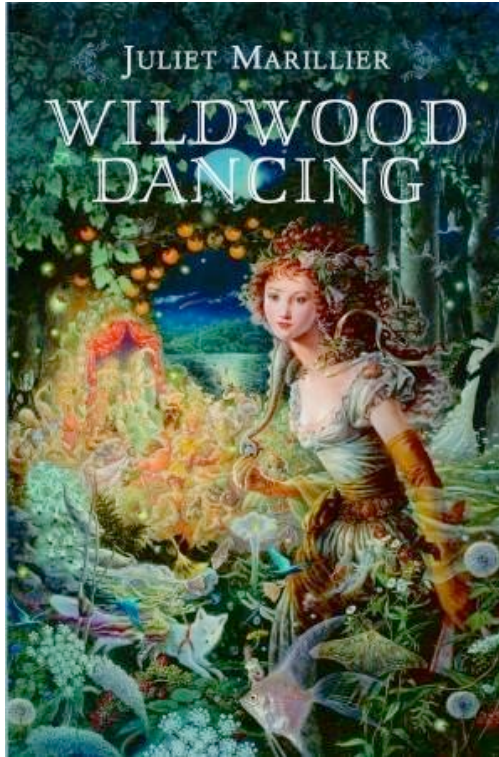
Linda Lappin's *Signatures in Stone* boasts a remarkable knitting of mystery and romance, a delicate and intricately concocted layering of mysteries... But not a romance of men, to be sure. Instead, she displays her own romance with Italy. Lappin lures the reader into the loins of Italy, describing it with a lust for its countryside and peculiarities as one might let on about a lover, but after she has us there, sets forth unburying the absurdities of the Sacred Wood – In Bomarzo, Italy – otherwise recognized, in actuality, as the monstrous sculpture garden of the Orsini family.

What must not be neglected, and is perhaps part of the mission of the novel, is the uncanny resemblance that Daphne bears to Linda Lappin herself. Daphne, like Lappin, is a mystery novelist (whose series is also incidentally called *Signatures*), and of similar age and residence. Lappin is exercising the timeless maneuver of writing about writing... and writing what you know. But what can't be denied is Lappin's extraordinary skill with these moves, and moreover, her incredible display of multiple layering of mysteries in the piece.

Lappin fills the Orsini Mansion with a group of unlikely company – all bloated with their own mischievous internal mysteries. She recurrently complicates every situation by forcing the reader to remain in perpetual flux between trusting and doubting the narrator and protagonist, Daphne’s (the wild, middle-aged widow) judgment of reality. When Daphne is nearly fatally attacked on several occasions by an unknown assailant, we are never sure whether or not to attribute these experiences to hallucinations or some other side effect induced by her “inspiration” substances (including hashish and absinthe). It’s as though Lappin, herself is not unlike her multi-faced characters, and is manipulating the reader. We may argue that the sensation is the literary equivalent to a skewed likeness of breaking down the fourth wall, but is increasingly more complicated because as mentioned before, Lappin may very well be personified in Daphne, and therefore simultaneously can and cannot be assumed as the narrator (who is inherently, via the act of narration, assumed to be addressing the audience).

In conjunction though, with the ongoing mysteries with which she decorates her human characters, Lappin entangles the mystery of perhaps the most important character of the novel – the land, the country, and the statue garden, or as it’s referenced, the Sacred Wood. Daphne becomes consumed with the mystery of this Sacred Wood – a place that bears the death of a secretive child who drowned in a fountain there, along with countless unsolved “signatures” which Daphne feels are specific to her. She is overcome by the sensation that she was always meant to be in this place at this time, according to destiny. But one of the grandest mysteries of the garden is who gave it life – and death – to begin with, who is the artist? Furthermore, it’s said that there is a hidden treasure of the garden. But the dominant supposition is that it’s not something of the tangible realm at all. When Daphne discovers a sketch that she is convinced may be an invaluable key to discovering all the garden’s obscurities, she becomes inconsolably obsessed with solving its mysteries. Bit-by-bit, in remaining faithful to the notion that “there is no coincidence in a meaningful universe,” the mystery designedly undresses.

Things Redefined: Ayesha Ali Reviews *Wildwood Dancing* by Juliet Marillier



Wildwood Dancing
Juliet Marillier
Borzoi Books, 2008

The best legacy of a book, I believe, is that, after a few years, you have the urge to seek it out again. This happened to me a few months back; I yearned to revisit the haunting beauty of *Wildwood Dancing*, a young adult novel by Juliet Marillier. When I set out to find this book, all I had to go by was the author's first name, for how many people do you know named Juliet? But I knew that once I saw the title, I would know it. As I searched, I wondered *why* I wanted to read it. As I recalled, it was a story about five sisters living in the mountains of long ago, visiting a fairy kingdom, a spin-off of the well-known European tale of the twelve dancing princesses, nothing that I would read. If nothing else, I had thought, I would at the very least visit a proper winter scene, one with many feet of snow and bitter cold. This would be nice, especially after two winters with very little snow and no temperatures below thirty degrees F. But underneath all that, I had a feeling there was more to it than that, more that I hadn't absorbed that first time.

What intrigued me the most during my second read was the overall feeling of danger and destiny that Marillier weaves so well into her story. From the first sentence, "I've heard it said that girls can't keep secrets" (1), until the last paragraph, "I did not think I would ever see my elder sister again" (400), the author uses many elements to weave this sense. One way she does this is

through her descriptions of setting. The story takes place in two separate universes, the one of the humans and daily life and one of the fairy folk, which coincides alongside each other in the Transylvanian woods. The five sisters and their father live in a "crumbling castle, set on a high spur of rock" at the edge of the dark woods which has "many strange tales attached to the place" (4). Right away this intriguing description hints at dangers, at mystery, at things unknown and, most likely, misunderstood by most.

The Other Kingdom, as it is described in the story, is described as an inviting, comforting yet quite foreign place. It is the same woods, yet quite different. The Other Kingdom is filled with "small bright creatures that were not quite birds or insects or fairy folk" and "sweet, whispering music" (14). As we unconsciously expect, there are no humans in this other kingdom, but the way that the narrator bluntly points it out, "the only human creatures in this midnight realm were ourselves" (11), provides a sense of wrongness, of foreboding that never goes away, although the girls remain perfectly safe on their full-moon trips. Juliet Marillier relies on this sense of mystery and otherworldliness to intrigue the reader, to keep us searching for the truth, for we know that there is much more of the wildwood to explore.

Marillier heightens our sense of danger through the narrator's uneasiness. The story is told through the view of Jena, an overcautious fifteen-year-old girl who, from the beginning, expresses her fear of that which she cannot understand or control. Although she travels to the Other Kingdom with her sisters and takes pleasure in dancing, she is not as excited about it as they are. Even though they are shown nothing but kindness and open arms, she still can't shake the frightening tales told by the people in her village. This is mainly due to an event that had happened many years back when she was five. Deep in the woods surrounding their home, there is a lake that has many frightful tales attached to it. When Jena was young her cousin had drowned in that lake, and whenever she enters the Other Kingdom she believes that there are creatures in the forest that she cannot see that want to harm them. Throughout the rest of the story she is always on guard, always finding danger even when there is none.

Unlike most main characters, Jena is not a very likeable person. She immediately comes across as overprotective and fearful, which are not characteristics that readers would want to associate with. However, Marillier displays this character in a very subtle way, presenting the actual nature of this character as secondary to the events of the story. She puts emphasis on Jena's youth, giving the reader optimism that the girl will do what is best and not get herself tied up. The reader can also not criticize the main character for her reactions, no matter how brash and selfish they may be, for there is no better alternative. Jena is placed in the most difficult of situations, and has been stripped of all power and control. She cannot make her own choices, and in her defense she does all she can to get some respect. Right away the reader can see that her methods are childish and ineffective, yet we know that we would not have acted any differently in her place. This creates a very realistic sense of suspense and keeps the reader intrigued no matter how horrible things get. You just cannot leave Jena in trouble.

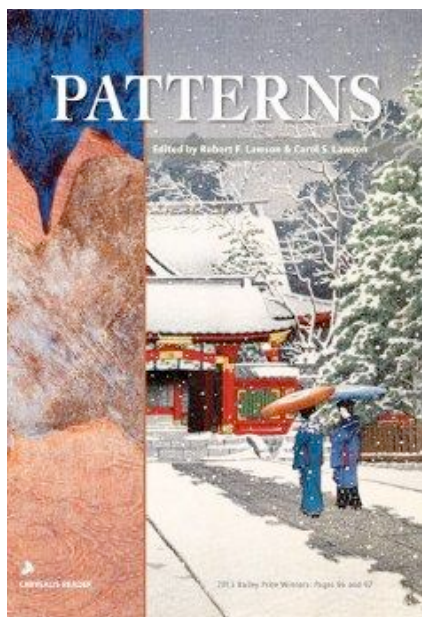
In a note at the end of her book, Juliet Marillier expresses her wish to portray the true mythology of the Transylvanian regions. Transylvania "is a land where bears and wolves come close to human settlements, a place where snow can lie heavily for up to six months of the year" (Author's note). She expressed unhappiness with how the region has been inexorably linked to

vampires through the Dracula story. She stresses on how she wants to move away from that stereotype and show true Transylvania. However, she doesn't exclude vampires entirely, instead showing them as Night P. The village tale of the Night People is quite similar to the vampire myth, in which they drink blood and prey on human female that they can be warded off by charms and garlic. However, as Jena frets over the myth, she also sees them. They are described as "extremely pale, their skin almost waxen in appearance, their eyes deep set, dark, and intense ... all were clad in jet-black" (21) which is what one would imagine a vampire as looking. However, their leaders as described as "especially striking (with) ... bony, aristocratic features: well-defined cheeks and jaws; jutting, arrogant noses; and dark, winged brows" (21), which throws the reader off.

Marillier tries to show them in a neutral light, but it is clear that she only does that to be fair. She does a fair job at the beginning, showing the male leader as being very polite and offering help to Jena. However, these are outweighed by several horrible deaths in the village, obvious done by Night People, even though there is no proof that the leader did it himself. She also shows the Night People's revelry as being quite horrifying and torturous. She tries to offset this by showing that they had taken two helpless humans under their wing instead of eating them. Near the end when everything is rapping up, Marillier throws in a sentence about how the leader had genuinely liked Jena, and leaves it at that. All in all her attempt is very feeble and would have worked much better if she had just shown them as, if not evil, but coldly indifferent.

Marillier does a much better job at portraying the original mythological creature, which she obviously loves. She introduces Dráguta, the Witch of the Wood, "the one who held the ancient secrets and wove the powerful magic ... she had dwelt in the depths of the woods since these great oaks were mere sprouting acorns" (22). Dráguta is merely mentioned throughout most of the book, someone that Jena is encouraged to go see for help. Jena thinks of her as unreachable, as if she were a goddess who would be angry if she were disturbed. When we finally get to meet her, she turns out to be a tiny woman with a "White shawl ... white hair, long and wild ... cloudy green eyes, like ripe goose' berries ... wrinkled face, beaky nose, fine parchment skin ... (wearing) little silver boots with pointed toes" (282). She is shown as more of an immortal woman ("Draguta's always been old" (283)) who has the time and patients to mold people to the truest potential. She treats Jena as a granddaughter that she cares about, but treats her with a slightly impatient air. The whole ensemble is quite unexpected, and is quite a good portrayal of a guardian spirit without making it divine. Overall, Marillier lays out quite an interesting array of mythological creatures and fairy folk, but does not give much sign that the story takes place in Transylvania. It could have taken place in any mountain range in the north.

As I close this book for the second time, I am once again struck by how unlikely it is I would ever read this story. But I knew now what had brought me back. Such a well-written story, with hauntingly beautiful descriptions and well developed characters, was worth the time and energy it took to find it. And now I come to wonder how much I missed from the other books I've read, even from those chapter books from elementary school that I practically memorized. Are they worth revisiting? Would they yield something completely new that I hadn't noticed before?



Patterns: Make 'Em and Break 'Em
Features Notable Artists, Poets, and Essayists

*"I've enjoyed this outstanding anthology for more than twenty years.
Examining the spiritual dimension of patterns? What a brilliant concept!"*
—Raymond Moody, M.D., Ph.D., international expert on death and dying; and
bestselling author of eleven books, including his seminal *Life after Life*

Patterns: Make 'Em and Break 'Em, the nineteenth edition of the Chrysalis Reader and the Swedenborg Foundation's annual anthology of poetry, essays, and fiction, is now available.

<http://www.swedenborg.com/archive/products/patterns-2/>

This literary collection of original essays, poems, and short stories enhanced with artwork focuses on the patterns that rule our lives and how we create them – and sometimes break free from them. Among more than seventy entries in this volume are works from poet laureates, acclaimed authors, and up-and-coming voices alike, including Robert Bly, Linda Pastan, Carol Kanter, Duane Tucker, Tim Mayo, Patty Christiena Willis, Donna Pucciani, and Kari Kynard-Ridge.

Robert F. Lawson and Carol S. Lawson, editors of the CHRYSALIS READER, present a new spiritual theme in each annual publication. Previous editions of the Chrysalis Reader are available through <http://www.swedenborg.com/bookstore/chrysalis-readers/>.

Patterns: Make 'Em and Break 'Em
Edited by Robert F. Lawson and Carol S. Lawson
978-0-87785-244-5, 272 pp, \$15.95 pb
Order online www.swedenborg.com or
Call 800.621.2736 USA/Canada