

The Neighborhoods of My Past Sorrow

JESSE MILLNER. KITSUNE BOOKS: CRAWFORDVILLE, FLORIDA. 2009.

In Jesse Millner's latest poetry collection we are certainly privy to "past sorrow." The "sorrow" is laid bare for us repeatedly, especially in poems that address a past struggle with alcoholism; we are intimately connected to Millner, who eschews all pretense of a speaker in these poems. In "I Confess," he writes:

I shrank inside myself, considered my unpublished book
of confessional poems, how each one of them was a page
from my life, a leaf of grass from the fields of my memory,
a tiny song of myself, that by book's end became
an egocentric chorus of all things me.

Millner's collection does not feel "egocentric," however, but rather like an exuberant worship of the poet's life—complete with a beautifully flawed hero-poet who finds more comfort in his dog these days than he does in the Baptist hellfire-and-brimstone God of his youth: "So many died for our God. / No one has died for Dog."

Religion and alcoholism are close bedfellows for Millner: both become inseparable components of his identity, and both leave him with a tremendous guilt. *The Neighborhoods of My Past Sorrow* is so compelling, in part, because we do not know, until the last section of the book ("La Florida"), that Millner has survived this fire baptism of religion and liquor. There is a real danger in these poems—a danger that our hero-poet will not outwit his demons. Even in a poem about his grandmother ("I remember the small table in Grandma's bedroom"), the danger is ever-present: "There's a wilderness / inside of me where the branches of beautiful / trees gleam with ice and the cold." Though for us, as readers, this "wilderness" safely belongs to someone else, we desperately desire Millner to carve his way through it.

Millner does make his way through the "wilderness," though does not come out unscathed—deaths of those he loves and divorce are only two of the fallouts which level Millner, bring him to his proverbial knees, and let us see him at his most vulnerable. Poems such as "Recovering Baptist," move us with their intimate power: "I feel guilty that in the eight years / we were married, we never made love / without a beer and joint warm-up."

In this collection, however, it is the poems that break us, only to raise us up again in glorious personal resurrection, that are my favorite. Poems that show us what it means to be human through a combination of the sacred and the profane make this collection shout its own fractured narrative from the rooftops. And in poems such as "Angels, Biscuits, Booze," we cannot help but listen:

Stop the world and let me off,
let me drift in shallows of space,

and French kiss drooling angels who know
all the words to my favorite country songs.

—Dominika Wrozynski

Horse Dance Underwater

**HELENA MESA. CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY POETRY CENTER: CLEVELAND,
OHIO. 2009.**

The language in Helena Mesa's collected poems, *Horse Dance Underwater*, of Cleveland State University's imagination series, is clean and sharp—a tight braid of lyric and narrative that is at once controlled and unpredictable. Mesa writes about primal moments. And the music and momentum of her lines (lines like: “charred and shored along the morning rift”) insist you read them out loud, even if you happen to be in public.

Her poem “The morning after” is part baptism, part orgy, part reverse anthropomorphism. It opens with two boys, “hair and skin salty with sex and sand.” They're looking for what they know they've left on the beach: grief, and our narrator:

For luck, I gave up,
let the water take me, first my back's arc
then neck then crown until I slipped
lower than I meant, into scarves
of sea wrapping around arms and breasts,

The poem is broken into thirds in a way that applies enormous pressure on the voice. By the break into the third stanza, we see no harmony between the perceptions of then and now:

silk that kicked my hair into the ocean fans
and slunk between my legs; I rose for breath
alone in the midst of close friends

and teens, hundreds of teens

enfolded, mouths roaming, tongues desperate.

One pair fucked two feet away, chest-deep

in kelp

The feeling of the previous night's awakening is undercut by the recognition of a "quiet lie: There's no fear in letting water prove / you can surface, whole, howling and alive."

Her writing has a speed and at times a violence. But the suddenness of her line assumes the behavior of her subject: an animalism that denotes the origins of emotional life. Creatures creep into nearly all the pieces, effecting Mesa's characters, one of whom writes her mother: "an animal sleeps in my mind, fur thick and mangled." Mesa's animals represent something mortal, frequently appearing as horses or deer, the most volatile and reactive of temperaments. "To Drive Along a Road of Deer," which references Petrarch's "Sonnet 190: Una candida cerva sopra l'erba," is one good example of this: "deer, crazed by light, pawing, huffing at a man / anchored on the bank. Anything else pales— / ghostly, chewing on cheeks and longing for what / is not."

"Horse Dance Underwater," is the collection's paradigm. Corporeal and watery, even in the desert, this poem has children loud and simple on a guided tour of a tannery: "boys / ride a chestnut's back. Its skin / bobs, from its neck, from its girth, / haunches, legs—flat, like bed sheets / laundered with those swimming boys." The children are singing thoughtlessly, but the narrator states, "This has nothing to do with grace, / only slaughter." That narrative lens widens in the poem's final lines to reveal what's outside the walls of the tannery, transitioning to the imperative (a shift that occurs throughout): "Soon olive branches will seed, / the desert will pull its reins tight / so the leather blisters. Pray wind / lifts the din of boys, splashing."

Varying mood and subject is what makes this work a living, breathing thing: one capering between landscapes of seas, and woods, and lonely beds. In this collection, weather plays, and it does so lyrically, exposing the people in the poems. People who are consistently wind blown and snow-blinded. And Mesa's skies are "charcoal beds left to die of their own accord."

In "Stasis at Fifteen," "boats float on water too deep for crabbing" and the voice's urgency accelerates a shift to imperative: "row to the canal's mouth where / stillness ends..." Here, her language is inventive: "There salt laps the air, / a gauze rag that scratches cheeks and gags / the buoys' clangs. Stop. Tie down each oar," always ending her pieces surprisingly and sorrowfully: "And what you want will come, swallow you whole."

Helena Mesa's poems are sleepless and sexy. Her broad reach of subject and voice keeps the reader absorbed as she moves from notes on saints to bilingual and bilateral contexts of loneliness and mortality. She experiments with form, line length, and lyrical density, but never without the undercurrent of a collective and primal fear: being caught in the soar of a Beechcraft, "knuckles white from gripping the earth."

—Arie Saint

Fire Pond

JESSICA GARRATT. UNIVERSITY OF UTAH PRESS: SALT LAKE CITY. 2009.

Jessica Garratt's debut collection begins with a hard truth: "Many are alone." What follows is a dazzling meditation on the nature of otherness, desire, and the passing of time that justifies the decision by judge Medbh McGuckian to award Garratt the 2008 Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry. Garratt's feelings of isolation and loss lead in to her poetic manifesto which is arguable stated most clearly in the opening poem, "Abstact;" she proclaims that she could escape such feelings if only the universe:

...might contract
into a face & a smile & a body
like the last one, dear
god; the soul of one
tucked away in one
whose face is still smooth
with infinity

This desire for intimacy forms the driving force of her work, as she writes that "wanting is the hinge on which you swing." What Garratt's looking for is something familiar amid the vast expanse of generalities, and this shows in her poems, which are nothing if not personal. *Fire Pond* deals with the everyday and the common: snippets of conversation on airplane runways, Fourth of July fireworks, dead mice appearing on apartment floors. They come to us "on a wave of disposable coffee cups," as she begins in the final poem of her collection, but they leave us haunted, as over and over again Garratt displays her talent for elevating her work above simple observations into the realm of fundamental questions of human experience. Her images are deeply wrought and developed patiently through her lines, as in "Mirador," in which she builds an image of a raccoon—"undulation of mass and fur"—into a complex encounter with the notion of death.

Her collection is punctuated by two longer meditations—the titular work, which is a sequence of sonnets, and the more free-form "Brooklyn, New York"—which together constitute her most imagistic work, and perhaps her best. While the latter paints a gritty view of New York, "Fire Pond" could be read as a summary of the entire manuscript. It boils down Garratt's major themes to ten sonnets revolving around a lake in New Hampshire, a relationship gone sour, fear of being alone, and finally, hope for rebirth and a new "willingness/to let the self loop out and back, to thread/each *You* anew." The final sonnet in the sequence contains her best lines, as it jumps from images of a slowly thumbed guitar to a screened in porch and ending finally

with Garratt's chorus which lurks in the heart of each of her poems: "the blank thrum of need, awoken."

Despite this repeating theme, *Fire Pond* never bores. Taken as a whole, the collection displays her ability to vary her style, and the poems in the book span from short, eleven line chunks ("The End of Things") to multi-page blocks of text (the Descartes inspired "Cogito"), collections of couplets and tercets (most notably "Epilogue" and "Permanence"), as well as the aforementioned long poems. However, she appears most comfortable working with mid length poems whose lines are indented in a repeating pattern, which allows her to delve into her images and come up, perhaps gasping, with her shining treasure.

This gasping might be the book's only flaw. When she dives well, Garratt shines, as in the wonderfully comical take on making love that forms the basis of the poem of the same name; however, sometimes the poems suffer from length and struggle to keep the reader's attention. "Answer This" thoroughly describes the surreal state of a town unattended, but perhaps too thoroughly, and this lessens the weight of Garratt's final images. But this and other blemishes—such as the gimmicky "Things Said (me & others, dreams & waking, yesterday & years ago): An Exorcism"—are so infrequently found amidst the mass of dazzling compositions that populate *Fire Pond* that the missteps are more than excusable and soon forgotten.

Despite its bleak opening, a motif of springtime and hope begins to grow in Garratt's work, subtle at first and not entirely benevolent, but soon pronounced. From an ode to spring's "fuck you froth of dogwood and crepe myrtle" to her Rilke impersonation "Elegy" in which springtime refuses the speaker, spring dots the landscape, popping up like grass between sidewalk cracks. What began as a dirge, as the pain of unfulfilled wanting, now emerges, as if from hibernation, in the celebratory final poem "Fasticle," a victory lap of sorts for Garratt, whose talents are on full display. The beating chorus of her work is now answered: spring is "lived in/for good," and while it retains her characteristic fears, it is now alive with the possibility that true connection can exist, and "nothing, not even their bodies" can come between the two blessed spirits. Her manuscript has come full circle through suffering and emerged as something fantastic. *Fire Pond* is Garratt's first book, but it reads like her life story, and this uncharacteristic maturity of style and substance makes it a truly noteworthy collection.

--Michael Shea

Self-Portrait with Crayon

**ALLISON BENIS WHITE. CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY POETRY CENTER:
CLEVELAND, OHIO. 2009.**

The prose poems in Allison Benis White's collection, winner of the Cleveland State University Poetry Center First Book Prize, are alarming requiems that disturb the natural order of things. Her images are haunting in the way that seeing the back of your head when you look at

yourself in the mirror is haunting. Images that point to the physicality of loneliness, particularly in a universe where people, sometimes mothers, “lose their minds and leave in the middle of cooking salmon.”

Largely influenced by French Impressionist/Realist Edgar Degas, White’s *Self-Portrait with Crayon* studies images of movement—and often women. But her peculiar states of intuitiveness regarding the nature of solitude (and women) are what ground the poems. In “Waiting” tension comes between two women ignoring each other at a restaurant: “When I hear her set her coffee back on the counter, I look at my napkin to pretend I’m occupied with my love of circles. This could be an aerial sketch of ballerinas, I think—each dancer ignoring the small white pain in her ankle.” These moments shore what comes next—the combination of unlikely images and existential bluntness:

This is a hinge at the end of a lake boat, but I still don’t know how to draw the fear of separation. We are alone for a long time. After many years, God said to the child, *There are hundreds of wet stones in your mouth—and inside stone, the possibility of black unopened umbrellas.*

While White’s medium is prose, it contains language that is disjointed and disorienting. The style serves the subject though, since an awareness of separation and brokenness is present throughout the work. *Self-Portrait with Crayon* is a collection “interested in suddenness.” As the mind tries to make connections between dark images and fragments of self-consciousness, it creates a sparking of synapses. The spark makes these poems worth reading: “When it moved she moved and when the hand came to pull her away, like the yolk of an egg through a hole in the shell, the warmth in her head was drained.”

In this collection a mouth is anchored in snow, and only the backs of heads stand to applaud. The psychology of these poems is devastating: figures only face away from the observer, the mind is blurry, and absence (the absence of a mother) is always present.

The first poem, “From Degas’ Sketchbook,” discusses absence simply, pointing it out by occupying its designated space:

The hidden are alone too. I crouched in the closet, between my mother’s skirts and shoes, where legs should be. Whether quiet or not, I would be found. It was an obvious place. Her clothes and shoes. I only have to say it once.

But as the reader moves through these pieces, the pressure of it intensifies. White’s language functions much like a sketch; her short, loose lines, though somewhat disconnected, give the impression of something whole.

If I press my hand against the window, no one will die sooner or reverse directions. And there are other things. The order in which dolls come. One Russian girl inside another, until the last, smallest one won’t open, can contain no one—the lack of pregnancy we admire in children.

Here is a discourse on the nature of abandonment and the “seven kinds of loneliness” spoken with a quiet urgency that both shakes the reader and demands exhaustive engagement.

--Arie Saint

Taste of Cherry

KARA CANDITO. UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS: LINCOLN, NEBRASKA. 2009.

It is no surprise that Kara Candito’s intellectual interests include critical literary theory, particularly Walter Benjamin’s illumination of the *flâneur*. The speakers in her poetry debut (the 2009 Prairie Schooner Book Prize winner), represent a whirlwind of contemporary *flâneurs* that are both detached from their surroundings, and yet keenly interested in them. “Notes for a Novice Flâneur,” provides a framework of this tension for the rest of the book:

Try to think of all this as a seduction.

A tourist trap or attraction...the self’s stuttering

between the holy pornography of marketplace

and passing glance....

It is a linguistic and image-rich seduction with which Candito expertly entwines her readers. Cage dancers in Miami, “lovely boys dressed up for the closeted CEOs cruising / Flamingo Park—the Ricardos, the Alejandos—names / like mint leaves that curled and came apart in your mouth,” are as dangerously appealing as the speaker in “Egypt Journal: The Poet’s Condition,” who “remember[s] the ménage a trois / I wanted, but talked myself out of one hazy night.” Not only do we become implicit voyeurs in Candito’s poems, we live vicariously through her speakers, delighting in every nuanced, imagistic observation.

Walter Benjamin’s criticism is only one of many literary, historical, and cultural allusions that Candito incorporates into *Taste of Cherry*. Not often do we see Walter Benjamin rub elbows with Dante, Ovid, Margaret Atwood, William Faulkner, and René Magritte, but Candito navigates these classical waters with ease. We re-discover Faulkner’s Caddy Compson, for example, as she details her life story to a therapist in “Girl in the Grass”: “I was born in a harness / of camphor and pear blossom. / *Go on.*” Even popular culture is fair game for Candito, especially in “On the Occasion of Our Argument During a VH1 Best Power Ballads Countdown,” where she writes: “I can read beneath the eyeliner / and the whammy bars, everything I’ve learned to love in men, / which is sloppy indifference and a vague threat of violence.”

Candito's canvas in *Taste of Cherry* is bold, sexy-smart, and unapologetic. The quotidian here is anything but ordinary—it is a sensual assault of images that leaves us breathless, heady, and drunk on language. She has trained her eye in many directions in this debut, but it is perhaps the moments of self-reflection that are often the most poignant, as are these ending lines in “Self-Portrait with an Ice Pick”:

What the body wanted was a blank room;

its own pain, untranslated, self-contained. If I can see

myself there, it's my eye in the windowpane, hazel

speck reflected back against a daze of sirens.

Candito has allowed us into the depth of her poetic vision, and we are grateful to linger there—in a world that has been made extraordinary again.

—Dominika Wrozyński

Trust

LIZ WALDNER. CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY POETRY CENTER. CLEVELAND, OHIO. 2009

Liz Waldner's poems just won the CSU Poetry Center's Open Competition. The collection, entitled *Trust*, reads unrehearsed—its poems seeming to find themselves along the way. Their lines are pushed in directions by Waldner's lexicon, but with a voice somehow surprised by its own “concatenation of rind and bung.” Giving the reader a sense these pieces arrived organically and fully formed.

Waldner has the English language in a chokehold (including Early Modern English). This is allowable, however, since it qualifies her manipulation of words and phonetics—a manipulation that becomes the poems' rudder, flexing the language to “transpose Limn Rime Spume Splay / into the tongue / of the flamingos / of the lip's ripe play.”

Trust is lovely where it revisits and rewrites biblical scenes, adopting a female narrative. In “Annunciation” the speaker stands after sitting on a stone for too long, and with the kind of self-assurance that always precedes sorrow says: “I wasn't fooled: I am learning to dance.” She addresses the reader then: “Why did I offer / to finger the angel's feathers? / His wings are terrible twin birds.” But interested in his mortality, she says: “I took a chance he'd lean and learn / the length of me. By the way, / he cared to dance.” Soon the mood of the piece shifts, giving us: “A cross could be four headstones in colloquy” and ending with “From here (between wings) you can tell (by the smoke) / all of the tombs are empty.”

In this collection the men are theanthropic and severe, while women are “the birth, the afterbirth, the maiden, the wench, the blood on the sawdust, the warm stench.” The voice, at times, sighs misandry in the poems with “penile palisades” as far as can be seen. “Miracle Whip, or Every Angel His Own B(r)e(a)dsread” parallels Jacob’s wrestle with God and a passive-aggressive domestic dispute. As the narrator makes a fire in the fireplace:

and the smell of burning hair.

Mine, of course. Look, I said,

I meant it as a compliment, a token

of my affection. He sucked a tooth, whereupon

the wire of the fire screen

impaled my thumb. I mopped the blood.

He sipped his tea.

But *Trust* also offers humor, much of which comes from Waldner’s wordplay. These moments are amplified by the tension around them. Liz Waldner’s grip on language gives new meaning to old uses, an inventiveness that makes her reader say, “Thank you, I have enjoyed / imagining all this.”

--Arie Saint

Song of a Living Room

BRIGITTE BYRD. AHSHTA PRESS: BOISE, IDAHO. 2009.

Song of a Living Room is a work that follows two lovers through a mirage-like journey of overwhelming passion coupled with the aftertaste of its faded zenith. Divided into seven sections, the book includes references to photography, theater, film, music, literature, writing, and philosophy, which are reinforced through imagery of the stage, the Georgian landscape, the domestic realm, and the seaside.

Like its two predecessors, *Fence Above the Sea* and *The Dazzling Land*, *Song of a Living Room* is written in prose poetry. As a movement which began in France to challenge the formulaic Alexandrine style of poetry, the prose form serves as a statement against rules and convention. Prose poetry has stirred much debate regarding the classification of works that blend narration with highly elevated diction and metaphors. Much like the characters in the text that resist passing through the threshold into reality, prose poetry occupies the liminal position of two spheres--what is actual and what is imaginary.

However, the audience is not to be lulled into complacency while reading the regularized style of prose poetry. To further deactivate the reader’s tendency to absorb her work without thinking, Byrd implements extensive usage of *ostranenie* by using French throughout her book. For example, in “(at the end of delusion there was still nothing),” Byrd writes, “Her eyes like his like a hit like muffled howling like a battered finale. *Accouplées, les choses enfantent l’erreur, l’horreur ou la beauté*” (34). Many of the lines in French are references either to or from other authors. The amalgamation of voices quoted with the

text--either English or French--reinforce the dreamscape-like setting in which other authors may chime into the action at any moment in any language.

The book begins and ends with the surrealist suggestion that all is not as it appears. The title of Byrd's first piece is named "(a brittle day passed by)," and the ending poem is called "(how to deactivate a brittle day with impermanence)." By beginning and ending the work with similar thematics, Byrd posits the question of when this story subsequently begins and where it actually ends. At one instance, Byrd hints at this methodology. She states, "In an attempt to produce a circular narrative she wrote the last pages with the first pages and he was not the same" (65). Byrd uses this technique of displaced time as she juxtaposes the titles of earlier poems with later ones: "(going around the country with a full orchestra)" in the first section contrasts with "(how to keep the head alive with full orchestra)" in the last portion of the book.

The irony of Byrd's titles and arrangement of work is further mirrored in her language throughout the text. Through meticulously crafting her syntax, Byrd manufactures unexpected but captivating metaphors: "a spoonful of orange sleep" (44), "time to let her room erupt with free will" (36), and "a corner of splendor" (14). Byrd weaves literary terminology into the most beautiful natural imagery-- "she collected her characters from words spurred on the carpet like blue mussels" (33) and "Just like that. Like a shudder in the narrative. Like the crumbling of his story. Like the sadness of her wings" (64). However, like many prose poets, Byrd occasionally lightens the mood with playful absurdity. She composes moments of sheer hilarity such as "He wore his ears on the side of his head and it was predictable," which gives the reader a temporary sabbatical from the seriousness of her subject matter (45).

Regardless of the tone of her language--serious or lighthearted--to read Byrd's poetry is to suspend belief in what is comfortable. Yet, if the reader is willing to trade the recognizable for the mesmerizing ballet that becomes *Song of a Living Room*, the experience will incorporate the senses in a fascinating ordeal. The book is a must read for any experimental poet searching for heightened language and enduring metaphor, as well as for any reader who can appreciate the sensuality of stunning word-craft.

--Anna King

A Boy's Guide to Arson

JARRET KEENE. ZEITGEIST-PRESS: LAS VEGAS. 2009.

"How many times must a boy say goodbye/to his superhero before the idea catches on?"

This book of poems is about what it's like to have a Nietzschean *ubermensch* for a father, a fragmented, four-color comic exploration into the world of a boy who loves and fears for a father who has the strength of the Hulk, Prince Namor's aquatic grace, and the indomitable will of Steve Rogers, a man whose example of masculinity is so impossibly heroic that the boy can only feel inadequate in the face of it.

In the book's first part, "Death of The Fireman," we listen as the boy envisions the countless ways in which his fireman father could be killed, his fear of losing his father to "the pulse of fire, the rhythm of flint and spark." "Death," the boy tells us, "is not a comedy for those who think." Even less so for little boys who imagine.

There is no physical abuse in this relationship; nonetheless, the boy is clearly frightened of the man he sees as "Captain Ash," "Dr. Smoke," God's own fire dog, and "Father Fire":

Father Fire, never did you raise a hand to me.

You never had to.

Your temper was a short-fused M-80.

Standing up to you, I would've lost.

Huge questions loom over the boy's imaginative landscape: Death, power, violence, will, God. His comic books have much to say about these issues, and their voices are augmented by the likes of Nietzsche, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Iggy Pop, and Moses. Images drawn from comic books, television, movies, and a "black fire scanner on the mantelpiece squawking/Bad news" are captured and incinerated to ash in the boy's imagination. Fire and death seem to be the only entities capable of challenging this gargantuan father-figure, so they, too, become objects of the boy's ambivalent worship, complete with their own litanies including the "Saint Oxygen Novena," "Fuel," and "What the Fire Said."

Especially moving are the poems in the book's last section, "Superhero Days" where, like photographs rescued from a house fire, the anxieties and black-metal distortions of the earlier sections are distilled into particular memories: a day at the pool, a trip to the hospital, a scene in a Tampa restaurant highlighting the father's serene capacity to meet violence with violence of his own. In the beautiful "Voices From the Fire," the son tells his father, ". . . By then I knew you preferred/ The company of danger to my own,/ But I went on anyway . . ./ Half-asleep in the shadows, eager for your victory,/The all clear of your mighty voice."

Although these poems are intensely personal, while reading them it was impossible not to think of other firefighters, police, the men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan whose children are nightly enduring the same fears and longings. Most of us, in fact, have at one time or another thought our parent were both fragile and omnipotent. Keene's strong, sometimes angry, often tender voice is just the right one to guide us back to that time, and remind us how true to life comic books can be.

--Ron Smith

Tuned Doves

ERIC BAUS. OCTOPUS BOOKS: PORTLAND, OREGON. 2008.

Tuned Doves is Eric Baus' second book, and the text is a haunting, mesmerizing compilation of prose poetry. The book is divided into eight sections of various lengths. Baus traces a son's relationship with his mother while employing motifs of the color orange, the sun, bees, sound, and speech. Like the

bees referenced so often in Baus' work, the reader is suspended between the honey-and-vinegar scents of language that make for a fascinating yet disturbing read.

Like his first book, *The To Sound*, Baus identifies the challenges of language and exchange. The titles of his sections and his poems allude to the conceit of impossible conversation. The sections "I Know the Letters This Way" and "A Dismantled Mouth" toy with the deconstructionist notion of whether language ever communicates at all. Further, the pieces entitled "The Tranquilized Tongue," "Without My Letters," and "Waiting for My Name" all point to the immobilization of the form and identity created by discourse.

While the titles cleverly allude to the obstacles of talking, the poem in first section "The Sudden Sun" also captures the complication of speaking. Baus writes, "a boy's mouth collapses into itself" (3). The image of a mouth caving inwards suggests not only that the mouth cannot perform, but also that its destruction was not of its own volition. This conceit of inadequate language continues throughout the work with lines such as "My voice is a reference to almost nothing" (65), "It is so obvious I do not know what swimming means" (30), and "I can no longer speak with my hands" (27). The speaker seems to feel that dialogue is a fruitless endeavor, but ironically, he does not cease to keep trying.

If language lacks function, then music is the counterpart to what human words cannot express. For Baus, sound operates as timeless when words become terminable. The sections entitled "Something Else the Music Was" and "A Ding and Its Echo" both imply a mysterious and eternal quality of music--contrasting sharply with the frustrating and inoperable tongue. In "Emergence of a Wolf," Baus says, "The phonological limbs of bees are evident on the plains of an impossible sentence," suggesting that sound is not limited by the paucity of language (42). The mother figure is said to "[sing] her speech to me," implying that exchange only takes place with music (7). The effect of an unexpected synthesis of sound and word is a completely new form of communication.

This abeyance between language and sound fashion an eerie void accentuated by the recurring gothic imagery. Lines such as "human or animal bones in the REM movements of babies" create a delicious yet weird sense of primordial memory for the reader (62). "A Distant Address" contains a more forthcoming mention of death. Baus writes, "A boy suspects he has been exhumed, ever since his shadows had grown in number, ever since it was announced that 'Subjects will no longer reside under the sun but in the ghost it represents'" (58). The character of the boy is now burdened by more than language--he now operates in the world of the uncanny.

While sights of death and darkness are referenced throughout the work, Baus' language is replete with gorgeous imagery. Baus is a master of unexpected beauty--"the snow in a sentence" (68) and "a sound between his hands" (11). He even hints at playfulness: "The language of vines is inherently explicit. Keep that in mind during an ambush" provides a clever play on the imagery of foliage (49).

By tantalizing his readers with unanticipated sensory detail, Baus is able to challenge audiences to rethink what is real and what is imaginary, what is lovely versus what is macabre. *Tuned Doves* is an assessment of contradiction, whether lamenting the inadequacy of language using the words he deems insufficient or blending lightheartedness with gothic subject matter. The text is sure to enamor readers who appreciate a festival of the senses that provoke a re-examination on how audiences label reality.

--Anna King

Souvenirs of a Shrunken World

HOLLY IGLESIAS. KORE PRESS: TUCSON, ARIZONA. 2008.

Poet Holly Iglesias is repulsed, yet fascinated in this prize-winning collection of prose poetry.

From the first words, the reader knows these poems will redefine what we call “the poem” and change how we look at the new century, and so the reader must change. But which century will we explore?

In the very first poem, a boy runs:

Shaken from a dream about hoboes, [he] hightails it through the garden toward the tracks, his stride lengthening with the pace of escape—hen house, flop pot, ice box, cheese cloth—past and future neck and neck.

These poems about the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis give us a postcard, impressionistic look at how this mile-long midway fair foreshadows “progress”—the beginning of the 20th century. The poet implies this tawdry amusement reflects the start of the 21st century as well. She began writing it just after 9-11, and finished the collection by 2004.

This is what it means to be an American, the poet says of the St. Louis World’s Fair: to see inequality in America; to witness the voyeuristic study of 2,000 tribal peoples around the world; to experience firsthand the filth, ambition, the “silenced other” “from various points of view.

In “Façade,” we’re reminded of the inequalities of what we now refer to as The U.S. (The “US”):
The park fills with noise, saws, hammers, gossip, complaints about the mud, flies, the cow gone dry. Glad for the work, the lot of us, camped in tents and abandoned streetcars.

Like a postcard from another place and time, we get to smell and hear just a slice of this history, yet it haunts us with echoes, for instance, of New Orleans after the flood of 2004.

And have the attitudes and questions about immigration left us? In “Race for Space,” we could be listening to a Floridian today wondering about the Haitian situation:

A noisome lot, these immigrants washing ashore day after day. We do not know them, nor they us, but swiftly do we grow to resemble one another.

Where will the sum of us ever fit?

In “Departed Darkness,” Iglesias seems to be channeling the future, present and past, taking the point of view of any forest dwelling tribe (such as those in *Avatar*, to take an easy pop culture example), giving the tribal people an imagined voice:

How to shape a story or dance with the moon in a forest without night?

Months now without tales of chameleons singing or nuts raining from the sky.

Confined to huts thatched with grasses long dead, we mourn the canopy

That once sheltered and fed us.

Towards the end of the collection, we see in “And When I Die” the narrator’s and the poet’s prayer and reflection.

My prayer for you is one of time restored to natural order, my fear that our

hearts will be taken to their capital in jars.

Though a little bleak, the truth resounds in the words of this prophet in the wilderness that no one really wants to hear. Yet, this voice will be heard.

(To see the historical references in the footnotes that accompany the poems, you may go to www.korepress.org).

--Mary Jane Ryals

Signifying Nothing

CLIFFORD THOMPSON. I-UNIVERSE: NEW YORK. 2009.

In this debut novel, set in 1979 in Washington, D.C., the Hobbs family has to deal with a sudden burst of rapping ability by their youngest son, Lester.

Lester has been mute since birth and is also mentally disabled. The novelist Thompson does well to take advantage of both the comedy of the situation—so much so you’ll be laughing aloud—and the drama. Despite the humorous take on the situation, Thompson writes a very *compassionate* story.

The thing about Lester is that he will, at the top of his lungs, chant/rant/rap/signify the not-very-exciting moments of his life—in public.

Sister born in fifty-six—they put her IN the big room

Brother came in fifty-eight and got the LITtle room soon.

I was born and then my brother took the BIG room with me

Sister got the little room and we three SLEPT hap-pi-ly...

Meanwhile, oldest child Sherrie holds promise as a chemistry student at Johns Hopkins University. Greg, the middle child, is an average student at Howard University. The two are horrified and embarrassed at first by their brother's rap rants.

Dutiful parents Pat and Madelyn, a struggling middle class couple, work to never cause a scene; they simply walk around in a daze.

Lester's random rants on the mundane have each character looking back at his or her life. The protagonists reflect on living as together as a family, and as individuals, they mull over the choices they've made in life. Up to this point, they've all just dealt with "the Lester issues," the sibling rivalries, and their missed opportunities. Now they are forced to realize that spontaneously-rapping Lester may have been the only one to notice the love that has held the family together.

Each character gets loving individual attention by this skilled writer through inner monologues. Sherrie must realize she's too fiercely "perfect," Greg must learn he can't force romantic love to happen, and Pat and Madelyn must embrace that they did the best they could under the circumstances. The love in this family unfolds in a subtle way that pays off for readers.

Writing to make people both laugh and care isn't easy. There is sadness in this book. But Clifford Thompson seems to have a corner on the market for giving us a wide range of emotions.

I know his next novel will keep bringing it on.

--Mary Jane Ryals