

Pattie McCarthy's *bk of (h)rs*: A Delectation

Apogee Press, 2002.

In his anthology of literary essays entitled *The Spirit of Romance*, Ezra Pound asserts that three major components — undoubtedly *the* three major components — of poetry are melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia. The first, which consists of the musical element in poetry, Pound found supremely embodied in the medieval Troubadour lyrics; the second, which Pound characterizes as “the casting of images upon the screen of the visual imagination,” found its assertive application in the brief-lived but highly influential movement of Imagism; the third, translated as “the dance of the intellect,” refers to word meanings — both denotations and connotations, as well as etymological resonances — and is the most strictly *verbal* of the three *poeias*.

Pattie McCarthy's first volume of poetry, *bk of (h)rs*, is a fascinating and highly original exploration of all three qualities. I find that, unlike so much verse, both contemporary and historical, her work resists a facile reading, and also resists interpretation, if by that we mean a reduction to a prosaic equivalence. As with the finest in poetry, *bk of (h)rs* is to be sipped and savored in repeated readings. I keep my copy by my reading chair, near my dictionary, and by the light of my 1920's pole lamp I taste it, swirling the words, their shapes, and their sequences around in the mouth of my imagination.

I approach the book from the outside. The cover is taken from a 14th-c. manuscript illumination of “Marie Magdaleine” cutting her hair. A swift glance inside the book, at the very end, reveals that the poet's hair is still uncut. However, the medieval reference is significant, both because the notion of the (transformed) survival of medieval Catholic liturgy shapes the text as a whole, and because the fact of abbreviation represented in the title is applied throughout the volume such that the reader is to supply the missing textual elements. Of course, “bk of hrs” may be directly translated and expanded to “book of hours,” but much of what is contained therein is either irrecoverable, like a lacuna in a manuscript, or is richly suggestive of multiple meanings.

This process of *abbreviatio* is not limited to excluding words; the spelling “(h)rs” reminds us that the “h” is silent, and warns us that much that is said — and printed — is to undergo a process of abbreviation on the reader's part.

After this initial approach, I look inside the volume, and find that it is subdivided into three sections: “bell (h)rs,” “(p)salter,” and “bk of (h)rs.” I am reminded of the sonata form in music, and I notice that the *shape of the text* on the page changes from section to section: the first section consists of the hours at which monks and nuns are called to prayer — matins, lauds, prime, etc. — and each of these sections consists of two columns of lengths unequal to each other, but of *exactly* the same two unequal lengths throughout. I don't know how these texts were composed, but it seems likely that an abstract, external structure was devised and the poems were poured into the units of this structure such that the structure generates the content rather than the reverse. This reverses the Black Mountain school's Projective Verse doctrine, and of free verse in general, in which “form is nothing if not an extension of content.” However, the form itself here serves as a kind of content, just as the canonical hours of the medieval church constituted a content into which the individual embodied souls were poured, and thus formed.

The second “movement” reverses this, and there is a great deal of experimentation with the shape of the poem(s) on the page(s). The second of these poems, “juli/an : :” recalls the structure of “bell (h)rs” but does not repeat it exactly; the seventh — or is it the fourth? it is labeled “.iv” — that starts (or is titled) “syllabus of errors::loved bells.” looks forward to (inexactly) the shape of all the poems in the final section. Thus, the second section/movement is one of evolution, in which a recurring structure is disrupted and a new recurring structure may be thought to be in gestation. Maybe.

The final section, the title of which is the same as the book's, contains massive blocks of text, each twenty-four lines long, the first line indented ten spaces and all the other lines running from margin to margin. These pages are as solid and blocky as Rothko paintings. Dense.

In this sense, McCarthy's phanopoeia consists less in Pound's "play of the visual imagination" than in the concretism of twentieth-century experimental poets from Apollinaire's *calligrammes* to Aram Saroyan's arm wrestling between typed columns (or individual words) and empty space. This is not to say that there is no phanopoeia in Pound's original sense — the very first poem of the first section starts:

blue, then. again she is—bending. against
a gilt-checked backdrop, palm fronds.
there is the denial of the senses & then
there is the obliteration thereof.

This poem is entitled "matins" and thus places us in the first of the prayers that monks and nuns ritually engage in as part of the monastic life. I don't know what precisely the "blue" refers to; it could be the color of the sky (a deep blue, since matins occurs well before sunrise), of the nun's habit, or even simply the color blue as visualized by the praying nun, perhaps having turned her mind towards Heaven. The phrase "again she is—bending" depicts the nun praying, so presents us with a narrative element. I am fascinated, having been thrown the preceding sop of referentiality, by the following clear yet seemingly irrelevant "gilt-checked backdrop, palm fronds." What are palm fronds doing as a design element in a nunnery? And then, all of the images projected upon the mind's screen in the first two lines are denied and obliterated.

Pound's "dance of the intellect" is present throughout this poem and those that follow. Partially, this is through teasing, partially, through indirection. Halfway through the second column of "matins" is the line "(instrument) for taking the stars" that, to the medievalists among us, translates as "astrolabe." A glance at the dictionary reveals that an astrolabe, which is a "medieval instrument used to determine the altitude of the sun or other celestial bodies" (*American Heritage College Dictionary, 3rd Edition*), is etymologically derived from the Greek *astro* (star) + *lambanein* (to take). This type of etymological play recurs throughout, as in, for example, "prime" where the line "vertebrae: something to turn on" defamiliarizes our notion of the spine from the "string of pearls" or even the fishing rod towards a much more dynamic construction. This process of defamiliarizing the spine continues in "sext" with "that the vertebrae are each small skulls —" with its possible evocation of Tibetan Buddhist prayer beads, distinct from rosary beads in consisting of tiny skulls.

In poem .iii of the (p)alter section, the lines "...during the fourth night-watch / the *aster* of disaster" serves as an etymological play — a "disaster" is a "harmful star," or what happens when a malefic planet is in a strong position — but it also suggests the watchman's soliloquy in the beginning of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, in which the man has been watching, night after night for years, the stars grind on around us as he waits for the signal fire of Agamemnon's return, which return the audience knows will only bring disaster. I am not suggesting that McCarthy here is alluding to Aeschylus, only that the schematic image that she presents suggests many possible traditional (and nontraditional) complementations. Indeed, the very schematic quality of the text as a whole forces the reader to complement the fragmentary skeleton presented to us. It is just that the skeleton is so richly suggestive that reading her work involves multiple unfoldings and interpolations.

The melopoeic element in McCarthy's poem(s) (is this a collection of poems or one long symphony-shaped poem?) resides not in a rhymed and metered text in imitation of the song poetry once was in the oral tradition ("I think that I shall never see / a poem lovely as a tree" etc.), but involves assonances and alliterations along the flow of the Heraclitan stream of words. I must interject here: this flow becomes a Joycean stream of consciousness, and the etymological associative escapades as of subatomic particles sometimes sparks atomic instability, both fission and fusion. In the final section, composed of the dense chunks of print on the pages, from the third page (p. 41; this section has neither canonical hours nor Roman numerals to mark the passage of the discourse) we find the following flow:

say something geographically accurate. sorcery from the syllogisms.
why don't we invert questions in our language? we suffer the tonic for an
elixir. archipelago like an adjective: does the thought re-shape the throat?
the imperfection of our future tense.

Taking the above segment as a core sample of McCarthy's text, remembering that a core sample is not *un coeur simple*, we see her moving from a command to a fragment to a question to a statement of fact to another fragment that leads to a question and then to another fragment. (The text goes on from there, of course; I have not excerpted either a stanza or a paragraph, but have cut the flow after "tense.") Although this sequence of a variety of grammatical forms involves constant shifting of mode of thought and address, we are carried through it by the rhythm of the phrases as well as alliteration ("say something" and "sorcery from the syllogisms") and assonance ("geographically accurate"). The phrase "sorcery from the syllogisms" reminds me — although there may be no basis for this in McCarthy's intention, as much of a fallacy as that may be anyway — of the associations between *grammar* and *grammerye*, or the study of the rules of the structures of speech and magic. An excellent example of how sound and sense intersect is the question "does the thought reshape the throat?" in which (via Rachel Blau Duplessis's technique of "sound mapping") "thought" + "r" (from "reshape") = "throat" on the sound level, and, on the level of thought/representation, we are confronted with the recognition that a thought put into words involves reshaping the throat in the process of pronunciation; I have read that silent readers unconsciously subvocalize as they read, so does this imply that the very thought of a word involves subconscious reshaping of the throat? This section has much more to entice the reader, but I will stop with the phrase "the imperfection of the future tense." "Imperfect" means, literally, "not completed," so, although the "imperfect tense" refers to actions not yet completed in a past time frame, the future tense as a whole refers to actions not completed (or even, in many cases, begun) in the present.

Pattie McCarthy's *bk of (h)rs*, I hope to have shown, is a rich treasury of verbal play that invites our in-depth exploration of individual words and phrases. It should be read with a good dictionary readily to hand, because the word play involves etymology as well as secondary and tertiary meanings. To take a phrase well out of context, advice for how to approach this text is about two-thirds through the final section: "should you need me in the dark, descend with care" (53). I say this (excuse me; I type this) because, for me, reading this poetry consists of floating through the text on the flow of sound — in the dark, since I have no idea where I'm going — with pauses in which I plunge into the etymological and associational depths of individual words and phrases — when I descend with care.

— Don Riggs

***Drafts 1-38, Toll*, by Rachel Blau DuPlessis**
Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

In *Drafts 1-38, Toll*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis brings together the work she has constructed over the past fifteen years into a structure which is organic and architectural: “some/scroll unrolling” “and in what language of uneasy rapture.” (“Draft 5: Gap,” 31). Functioning as one long poem and also as individual sections or drafts, there are connections here to Pound, Olson, Zukofsky, to feminist and post-structuralist thought: all evident and important to understanding Blau DuPlessis’s work. However, in this limited space I would rather take up other questions: how does this work function as retrospective? And how can this work, much of it from the late eighties and nineties, be read in light of current post-language turns toward new forms of narrative?

While readers of contemporary poetry and readers of Blau DuPlessis’s work in particular are familiar with a terrain in which language and perception shift constantly, “leaving molds and holes crusty/ jagged And settled with/ The slightest shift...,” there are “new outlines, not that different” (“Draft 32: Renga,” 207). Or are they? Blau DuPlessis asks us to reconsider whether the work’s own lacunae present realities which are

Not that different, but different enough.
I stare with the deep-filled eye of the past
along the unrecoverable border called “my life,” “today”
or “now”
where any detail becomes a limen.

(“Draft 32: Renga,” 207).

It is precisely in this threshold reconsideration between “not that different” and “but different enough” where the particular power of *Drafts* lies. By reconsidering earlier drafts, through the procedure she aptly refers to as “the fold,” and by employing a series of repetitions of lines and phrases throughout individual drafts, Blau DuPlessis has created a rhizomatic retrospective. While the drafts are arranged in chronological order, they spread out from a lost center, spiraling forward and back between and among their various parts. Further, the poet’s admitted inability to recover her own history according to received forms (i.e. past/present/future) leads us to a fertile space which functions not as a single event or epiphany but as a fugue-state with many possible locations of meaning in which appears

nothing and everything
plaster-faced dolls,
plastic tops from margarine tubs,
tin tea trunk

outcrop

along strata of ever-disjunctive

folds, and smash.

(“Draft XXX: Fosse,” 191)

Throughout *Drafts*, such listings of debris and memorabilia multiply and fall apart in a dizzying centrifugal motion: There are lists of flower colors, house clutter, and the marketplace in all its attractive/repulsive glory. What narrative there is, once blown apart “along strata,” functions like a house which has been demolished, the remnants of wallpaper fluttering against a wall, the x-ray of where stairs may have once been. And we join the poet-detective on this crime scene, piecing together what evidence we have.

Experience what the locals already know. Networks of reminiscences
In the reading, constructions of déjà vu, lush chaos

Transparencies if the scattering—it is so blown away that it appears
Hardly at all, even the residue is invisible, hardly a trace.
(“Draft 13: Haibun,” p.89)

Within the “lush chaos” of *Drafts* we are free to find our own way. Aware of a place in history in which we have almost completely lost the “trace” of the old way of piecing together narrative, we are left to reconstruct our own stories out of personal/public debris. In this sense, Blau DuPlessis’s work is deeply political and progressive. Its gesture is always toward the mind of the reader as much as it has a brilliant mind of its own. Ultimately, Blau DuPlessis helps us to recognize our own loss of origins and to enter a new terrain which comes out of this admittance of slippages and loss. Her influence in this regard is enormous. She continues to pave the way for a whole new generation of writers who are aware of the limits of narrative yet interested in taking up narrative’s new hybrid forms.

— Ethel Rackin

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An Interview with Marcella Durand

Marcella’s Western Capital Rhapsodies was published by Faux Press in 2001.

Chris McCreary: One thing that fascinates me about your work is the juxtaposition of seemingly opposite facets of existence: on the one hand, we have mystical pirates, and on the other hand, we have the mundane tasks associated with slogging through another day of work. How do you go about combining mind-numbing capitalism and esoteric magic?

Marcella Durand: Last night I read an article about a scientist whose work methods radically differ from mine, but there was something in his story that gave me certain insight into my own writing process. For the last 27 years, this scientist has been observing a population of birds on a remote Arctic island. For a long time he didn’t receive any funding to do so, as his study seemed totally obscure and unimportant. However, it turns out that he now holds one of the most concrete evidences of global warming, as he is one of the few — if not only — scientists to continually observe the same population of a particular animal. He has proof that the birds have been returning to the island to nest each year earlier and earlier (which mean summer is becoming earlier), and now he is even conducting studies of the chemical composition of their feathers, showing that food sources (i.e. plankton) may be declining. His long-term observational process reminded me of Francis Ponge, who closely observes a “thing” through language and ends up with these incredibly vibrant and detailed poems. I am a big fan of observing the obscure, as, being obscure, it is unedited and passes below the big-gun radars. I’m also a big fan of juxtaposing obscure elements in the hopes of igniting reactions, seeing patterns, seeing what happens. As a kid, I used to draw pictures and then mix up cups of various stuff (tabasco, cough syrup, soda, whatever) to “develop” the pictures. I can say that I developed an impressive substance that permanently cemented my drawings onto my windowsills (where I had placed the “treated” drawings to dry in the sun), but what I loved most was not knowing exactly what was going to happen in the first place. I still love that — taking two wildly disparate elements, pirates and capitalism, as you say, and seeing what happens when they’re put together in a poem (pirates of industry?). One aspect of Cecilia Vicuna’s work I love is that she takes the tiniest bits of what most people think of as garbage, such as a piece

of string she finds in the street, and she focuses attention on it — making that detritus more precious, and us more aware of what’s around us. She also reveals patterns about which way the water runs in her street, making the string shape a certain way, and that there’s a slight slope, indicating an underground river that’s been paved over. You say “esoteric magic,” which I guess has a place here — who we call “magicians” were often early scientists and doctors. The midwives in medieval ages probably knew more pharmacology and horticulture than anyone else around (definitely more than the priests!). I like the idea of “casting” in magic, cooking something up, involving arcane words and potions, and then casting it out to see what effect it has in the world. I like the idea of “casting” my poems out there to divert our ecological direction a little — a transmission from interior to exterior.

CM: I’m always curious about the more mundane processes behind the writing life as well. How’d you get together with Faux Press?

MD: “The Power of the Internet.” Gary Sullivan asked me for work for a webzine he was guest-editing called theeastvillage.com. The editor behind the guest-editor, Jack Kimball, liked my work well enough that he asked me for material for an e-chapbook series he was starting at fauxpress.com. Jack liked the series I gave him for the e-chapbook well enough that he asked me for a full-length manuscript for the new press he was starting, Faux Press. Boom, boom, boom. I actually didn’t meet Jack in person until the book party for *WCR*.

CM: I’ve heard a bit about the “manuscript grrl-group” that you mention in the acknowledgments section. You were all working on longer/book-length projects, right? How did the group members help shape the manuscript? What sort of peer feedback are you looking for at this point in your writing life?

MD: We all were working on longer projects. We met not only to read and discuss these projects, but just to talk about the whole process of publishing, as well. It was great to just lay out some of our concerns about publishing — even down to how we felt about typesetting, layout, and size. We all had been involved with our own publishing projects, so we were all used to having more control and input over how our work was presented, and it was interesting to think about how we were facing a process where we were probably going to relinquish that control to a larger organization. At one point, we decided that all of our projects needed larger-sized books, and that we needed to start a press of our own called something like “Large Women Publishing.” We really made ourselves laugh with that one — it felt so subversive. As for my own project, what the group particularly helped me with was the order of the poems in my book. When we met, most of my material had already taken on relatively concrete form, but I was finding the ordering of my book particularly traumatic and was really getting lost — the manuscript group gave me truly *essential* support in making decisions there. The group has sort of petered out for the time being, but I hope that when we rustle up some new projects, we’ll meet again. We’ve certainly still been in touch in a variety of ways — less group-oriented, perhaps — but very supportive, such as coming to each other’s readings, etc.

CM: Speaking of readings, how many do you find yourself going to? Even here in Philly, I often find myself feeling overrun by them, and the options (and occasional obligations) are much more numerous in NYC. How do you handle that?

MD: It’s very difficult to handle them. I can actually get angry at how many readings I feel obliged to go to. I can’t get angry at the readers, of course, but it really starts to feel like an invasion of my writing and living time. This year, I had to say “enough” — after four to five years of intensely going to readings, I really needed to stay home and work on my own projects. I regard the readings as input, and at some point, you need to output. Kind of like puking after a Roman orgy! Except the Romans dove back in, I guess. On the other hand, the excessive cornucopia of readings here is an amazing expression of community and my time working full-time at the Poetry Project and going to readings constantly really inducted me into the poetry world in a way that I wouldn’t have gotten staying at home. I guess (sigh) it’s all part of the reason I live here in the first place.

CM: Looking ahead, what are you working on these days? Any other book-length manuscripts underway (or already in the drawer)?

MD: I've been working on a few different projects — I don't know if they've started to cohere into another manuscript. One set of poems that have a working title of "body poems" are sort of anatomically oriented, exploring posture, intimacy with one's own flesh, physical strength and weakness, relationship. Then, right after 9/11, I felt a strong urge to leave the planet Earth, so I started a series of poems based on the solar system — writing on each planet in a very lyrical and metrical way, while using as a source text this ridiculous guide to the solar system that I've had since I was about three. Those poems have a lot of devastation and loneliness (lonely planet, ha) — one poem I wrote about Pluto was very wrenching! (probably too lugubrious, although I did try to stick some references to Disney Pluto in to lighten it up. That sounds sort of horrible, doesn't it?). Funnily enough, writing in lyrical and metrical forms for a while was very seductively enjoyable, but last year, I started a collaboration with Tina Darragh that was mind-opening. She lured me back to the intense intellectual pleasures of collaging, breaking up words, language, letting outside sources enter into your work, fragmentation — all in a way that functioned with this nascent idea I have about "ecological poetry." I also wrote one poem a while ago in a completely different form for me — I felt like this was some sort of absolutely "new" departure — I very recently took that same poem (after a "dry" period of several months of feeling unhappy with the lyrical forms, with my book, with my own writing, etc. etc. etc.) and started rewriting it, trying to take it further. It was quite exciting to do so, but I'm not sure the results are going to hold up yet. I use a lot of repetition, which seems to be a little bit the technique "du jour," but there are too many possibilities still inherent in it for me to leave it. It's too useful structurally and conceptually for what I think I'm trying to do.

CM: And a standard interview question: what're you reading these days? (Feel free to plug books by friends here, etc.)

MD: I just have to say that there has been an amazing explosion of books this and last year published by younger poets. I can't believe how many "goodies" that I've gotten recently that I'm looking forward to reading, and I'm so happy all these people are getting published, although I hope the reception of them isn't diluted by the numbers. Let's see: Pattie McCarthy's stunning *bk of (b)rs* (which I've read in manuscript but am now happily in the midst of again), Garrett Kalleberg's *Psychological Corporations*, Lytle Shaw's *The Lobe*, Karen Wieser's *Eight Positive Trees*, Edwin Torres's *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker*, Eleni Sikelianos's *Earliest Worlds*, Lisa Jarnot's *Ring of Fire*, Renee Gladman's *Juice*, Brandon Downing's *The Shirt Weapon*, Jennifer Moxley's *The Sense Record and Other Poems* and more, more, more! I've also been reading an incredible amount of French poetry — Francis Ponge, but also interesting contemporary writers like Esther Tellermann, Philip Beck, Pascale Monnier's recently translated and published *Bayart*. This francophilism is through two major projects I'm currently involved with (the ones keeping me home at night) — the www.doublechange.com web site and an anthology of contemporary French poetry that I'm co-editing with Kristin Prevallet and Olivier Brossard. As for "lighter" fare, I've been reading Mike Davis's *The Ecology of Fear* and various beach books from my local library, which hopefully is making enough from my late fees to make up for the recent insane cuts in their funding.

Some Notes on Hank Lazer's Note

Days, Lavender Ink, 2002.

In *Days*, Hank Lazer's latest collection of poetry, one encounters a successful labor of love, a day journal in bass syncopation and off-rhyme—such musicality! Then, sparingly employed in a “laboratory space for experimentation with the resources and possibilities of the short line and for new modes of lyricism”, graceful Mobius strips of words glide across pages, endlessly strung together and moved along through a calendar of sound, breath, and silence. The influence of “source-elements” in this text: Monk and Stein, Zukofsky and Oppen, Creeley, Coltrane, Miles, and Dickinson among other countless cited or unannounced amalgam, roam this space, having been sifted through the poet's imagination and memory, now accompanying his original mind.

The core as in *corazon* of this enjoyable book is not without sentiment, yet it circumvents the sentimental by transfusing emotion with experiment, and vice versa. In this series of poems Lazer has found himself without regret, “...a way away from some of the implicit do's and don't's of avant garde praxis” hoping “...the tutelage of Thelonius Monk...kept the writing “wrong” enough...”—and the writing *is* wonderfully wrong enough. Moving the reader through alternating melodic and disjunctive ‘notes’ without ‘responsible’ stylistic weight, the reader follows willingly, even slightly suspended as one might experience “A Love Supreme”, to another day and the next variation.

84

slow to slogan

voracious to

veracity amen

to mendacity

flesh to pleasure

legs to legendary

costly to apostle

mesh to measure

& i wake up

next to you

Throughout *Days* Lazer candidly plays with his capacity for observation and affection: of and for language, rhythm, and specificity: the word, its syllables: 138 “fabric echoes fabri // cation you're making // that up &...//.” Equally, amusement and gratitude embrace unpredictable turns through the ambitious/ ambiguous quotidian ‘day’: the familiarity of loved ones and objects, a concurrence of nature and ideas, passion for vernacular and humor. 138 (cont.) “country boy eddie// says I never et// y mology I didn't// like the local// not dirt but// deep down in the// vowels of the earth” 74 “I sing the body// eclectic uh defective// icing the bawdy//...” These miniature, midstream reflections entered in a humble diary, not “breathy epiphanies”—too knowledgeable and modest for that, *Days* is not actively seeking answers; yet in its constant inquiry preemptively rejoices in, receives, then offers its generous rewards. As many of these rewards seem to come about through chance, this willingness to explore in *Days* calls to mind Norman Fischer's “doubt and accident...at the heart of what art has always been”, as well as parallels to Fischer's *Success*: the journal as ontological query, art as the “undoing of everything”, the layers of ‘chance’ in Lazer's words, and their oxymoronically accurate placement.

137

everyday is doubt
here pictured
as you will
red glads bend
the stalk stutter
& sudden stud
your talk re
deploy fan out
men & comb
the gully & the ridge

The book itself is a lovely entity. The 232 poems are encased within a cover of black and a-dash-of-red-strokes (tadpoles?) on a glossy white background (untitled painting by poet and painter Che Qianz, ink on paper, 1993). They are then embedded between scarlet front and back inside pages which open to the white and black of the printed page; visually and tactilely pleasing, announcing the experience of the senses to come. The design of the poems of mostly neat short ten line blocks emphasizes a Haiku-like brevity of the ‘extended’ moment—the day, while select words resonate in a palimpsest of possible readings. This is all enhanced/negated through mischievously adroit puns and alliteration, penciled in numbers and marginalia, corrections and enjambment. With great skill, Lazer moves the reader without manipulation, while challenging and amusing her/him sufficiently toward the next day’s installment in this deeply felt and intelligent foray into the ordinary. The poems in *Days* are not definitive; they easily accommodate improvisation and ir/reverence, never belying an Eastern capacity for clarity and inconclusive wonder.

189*

his mind I
feel most
akin to mine

‘The virtue of the mind//

Oppen/CP p.87

“Guest Room”

Is that emotion//

Which causes

To see.’ love

i say felt intensely

as premise of

petition

sudden clarification

— Alicia Askenase, July 2002

**Note: The italicized text above represents Lazer’s hand-written notes that appear within and alongside the poem in Days.*

Mariana Ruiz-Firmat
Surveillance Steals Another Memory

i am a genius and my famous liver is more than wondrous. have you seen the latest
marriage? a circumstance not much categorized in three ways
who should i have first set out to do? the man said i was magic
i felt Charity was of the fungal world shuffling
smoking to the bed the day i became a girl
the bigger mistake came i hadn't planned to tell Kiki
i was scrambling the depth of my medi
saint medi ocrity a big fight that morning over her
the air was heavy she was bending over me
the center of all cigarette roses sized to this dimension
i think it was agreed by all parties I've slept with
back then i was nauseated with disease
have you seen the latest pills? "My chloroform bottle"
always four o'clock of everyday in the sticky room
lunch at the Pox Hospital with mami
only pure terror in store for me now until the red dotted Spanish fly lands
"How long can i sit here, a body in this room?"
you plant a border of poppies in my yard it becomes more real
in this city of thousands it is the end of that era i barely remember
teeth soft and barely grown sickening even close to the end
no one believed me i wanted to ask why do you settle on my horror of thousands?
let's play a comedy could we instead play all three
Charity TV buzzed out
into that precious dust upstairs slams the door always in memory
when he comes out a man of 65 to leave behind mother
he barely says I love you and doesn't remember to turn on his wings
What were my 14 year-old dreams? of being a crime fighter.

Poet's Last Word Review: Heather Fuller's *Dovecote*

Edge Press, 2002.

Alternative Rock was kind of funny when everyone was doing it. A shift in the paradigm is always a hallelujah though, so I'm not knocking anything. Just because "alternative" has a sudden rush to the crank in the Cloneville mill doesn't mean beautiful things aren't at hand. Poetry had a similar shift around the same time. Many poets had been listening intently to the direction of that pre-Alternative Rock set, those old smoky LANGUAGE poets, with a cup of Beats, dash or two of Black Mountain, New York, etc. And it has certainly paid off once in awhile. What excites me however is when a poet like Heather Fuller throws *Dovecote* at you and you realize what it means to stand on the shoulders of all you've been absorbing and come out unique. "Dear Perreault" she writes, "on the wall a veil sprouting horns my hair". Fuller is one of those poets of my generation always breaking up the jail before breaking out. She's an alternative alternative, the truly altered. Fuller's way with her lines epitomizes what Alice Notley has recently said on young poets today defying the tedious categorization and politics of her own generation. There's something much more important here, something raising the stakes without need of elder approval, HOORAY! Now, when you get your *Dovecote* open, your compass is pointed south. Get this INTO YOU!

"Talking to dogs and
hearing dogs deep
listening to dogs
who don't find themselves
paid off and obsolete"

— from "Codes South," p.20

Read her through your plasma. Does that sound corny? OH SO WHAT *LET IT HAPPEN!* Ask Fuller directions when you're half read through it. It's a map for those without need of arrival.

"I periodically disappeared for days
with memory of what I hadn't done."

— from "full logic system," p.41

If you miss this joy don't come crying to me! And if you're not used to reading poems backwards for extra spike to the tonic, start with "rent" on page 60 please. You too can find the "epoxy mummy" in it. But jumping in the shower is good before running around infernos in here.

"And one trick-or-treater missing

{in an all-time low act of organized idiocy
who leaves his patrol to search the gym

the FBI raids the shelter
trick or treating"

— from "prophecy," p.58

Placque of tenderness wills in place of running line to line for an understanding. A music that never runs cold on you, Fuller gives the maddening extra body conditioner no one should step around.

“Hire a jackhammer
pledge today in the roundabout debacle

*no sidewalk has made a difference
made people stop talking to themselves”*

— from “public,” p.61

CAConrad: Dear Fuller, I’m standing in the middle of “for who’s keeping count” looking for a place to chop my hair and not turn back. Any suggestions?

Heather Fuller: dare repeat these overkill and

the love of an armed woman

steel sheet for where the stomach

labored respiration and a stolen rucksack

dig the socktoe of coins

up a remedy for the Mercy

Road with the tongue half-dead

in its furrow a politeness

picked up a straggler heading

toward the wish for six windows

INFORMATION GLADLY GIVEN
BUT SAFETY REQUIRES AVOIDING
UNNECESSARY CONVERSATION

left off by the bluebottle tree

— CAConrad