

WITZ

For Members of Syntax Projects for the Arts

EXPLICATIONS

By Nick Piombino

The Return To Prose

This poem describes the poet's feelings about the poems of a close friend. Beginning with an evocation of sounds of streams and rivers which can be heard but not seen, the poet declares that the friend now "refuses to dirty his hands even in flowing water." A flower which flits by in a "blur of yellow and green" becomes the starting place of a melancholy description of the passing nature of all things, even friendships. But ("as it were") the poems created by the two are "preciously connected." Yet even these disappear, when the matter is examined closely, in the "many faces of time." Perhaps in the following several lines the poet is being ironic when he writes that only on the page death and life are "inter-changeable." "Flickering lights," "momentary villages," "muffled sounds" are all ways of depicting momentary pleasures. In the final passages, the poet recalls the earliest verses of his friend. These were "primitive," "vast," "undifferentiated," yet their "echoed darkness" is what is now best remembered—paralleling the vast blankness of "futureless time"

when neither poet will "live in uttered words" but will have joined the "inexplicable silence" of death.

Failure To Exist

The poet's implication here is that it is probably no longer possible to create a poem. This is made clear in the opening passage which depicts the impossibility of describing the most beautiful and touching aspects of what it means to feel. Speaking of an "ironic sun" and a "black hole of comprehension" the poem here dwells on a series of infinite parallels, digressions and reflections. "Passion evaporates into transparent calm" is a line which may refer to the exaltation implied in a poet's silence. "This isn't real — it feels too good" may be ironic or sincere. "Hatred follows hard on joy" may signal the poet's despair towards anything that can be said too directly. "Mostly movie stills," "false memories," "tiny sights" all refer to the frustrating aspects of communication via images. "Life has been replaced by words, only silence moves me."

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Here the poet encounters chaos in the heart of the most meaningful aspects of private satisfactions.

Autumn Thoughts

Autumn is the season closest to a state of mourning. Describing in great detail the "smells," "wetnesses," and the "encroaching cold and dark of winter" the poet is here attempting to set the scene for a comparison with a state of resigned acceptance of life's "mirrored states." It is unclear in what follows whether or not the "bassoons and oboes" refer to real or imagined music, but it is clear that "thought, which is a kind of music" is as "unceasing and unchangeable" as the seasons.

Promises

In this enigmatic poem, the scene shifts from the external landscape to the internal world of memories. The sea is evoked as a paradoxically moving yet static storehouse of movement of "living things" and their "living reflections." But soon it is unclear if a sea is being described or the universe, the reality of one mind or "the universe of shadows." Light and dark become, alternatively, a man and a woman, the sky and the sea, electricity and its conducting mediums, Joy and disappointment. It is true something promised to exist ("the promise of a poem") but we are unsure if it has actually come to exist. Several themes of previous poems are here alluded to, along with the rather maudlin observation that "no one who knows a poet well sees her as a genius." This is reminiscent of the line in "Narcissus": "I am a friend of a poet who lives alone." At the end of the poem the word "promise" is evoked in its other meanings -- something expected about a person. This is a reference to "real" expectations of a poet in terms of "substance" -- which "murders not only the intent of poets but their promise."

Passages

Although at the outset, "Passages" seems to refer to trials or difficult lessons, it soon becomes clear that it is mainly the poetic process which is being evoked, specifically in the form of "passages" which can be separated from the specific poem as wholes in themselves. This is seen as a paradox, in that a poem itself is one thing, but the passages

themselves constitute not only parts of a whole but one whole. The poem is then conceived as a series of "ages" very similar to the developmental sequence, infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, old age, death. The poet then draws a few quick comparisons. Like the lives of most human beings, the poem allows its life to overtake it in a series of dumbfounded surprises. An analogy to this might be catechresis in which the mistakes themselves are incorporated into the pattern being woven. Like the poet, the poem "never really had a childhood, adolescence was a war, young adulthood shallow and evasive, adulthood a series of late lessons, and old age a harvest of regrets." The obvious point, which "must be made" is that what could a poem be but a "reflection of ourselves." Yet this "harsh shadow" is not our "real reflection" but a "painted darkness" of human doubt. The poet then conceives the ending of "Passages" as a round. "A new generation of poets" will emerge, which will "recover" (in both the sense of cover over again and regain) the old powers. Because of this, the poem's ending, like death, counters "unknowing with silence and empty space."

Unread

The poet notices it is no longer possible to read. Even a few minutes of looking at words and even briefly considering their meanings produces a prolonged reverie. A recent bout of this allowed the poet to "think for hours" "idly circling familiar thoughts" like a child on a "merry-go round." In any case, reading itself invariably leads back to the original motivation -- this is "the categorical avoidance," perhaps. The poet then observes with chagrin that even Beauty itself is not a consolation for unread poems which are "unseen shadows" the inevitable and "undemanding shelter" of "meager and unfed thoughts." But just as a "room is rarely noticed and almost never the foundation" the poem is the "rock of ages, the ground from which we spring." Yet it is one in which "the singing's not in the voice but in the deep breaths arising from the song."

* * *

Narrative as Poetic Space

By Stephen-Paul Martin

I guess you could say she felt she could tell me anything. How else could you explain her complete lack of hesitation in announcing, on our first date, that a month before she'd had a UFO experience? It's not the kind of thing you just blurt out to someone you barely know, even if you came of age in the sixties, and you were caught up in the idea that it's best to wear your private life on your sleeve and not worry if people don't like it.

Anyway, she said she'd been unable to sleep one night and had gone up on the roof to get some fresh air. After maybe ten minutes, she was starting to feel more relaxed, ready to go back to bed, when she noticed what she thought was an airplane approaching. As it came closer, hovering, she decided instead that it must have been a helicopter. But the odd thing was that although it was fairly close, she couldn't hear any noise, no sound of whirling blades or grinding engines.

It came closer, soon seeming to be little more than a small cone of pale green light, spinning and softly humming. She began to feel dizzy, faintly nauseous. The next thing she knew, it was two hours later, the sun was coming up, and she was on her back, waking up on the roof, her mouth filled with words that might have been parts of a jigsaw puzzle, scrambled remains of a dream like urban garbage washing up on a beach.

At the time, she'd simply dismissed the event and plunged back into her daily routine. It only occurred to her later, having read Whitley Strieber's *Communion*, that what she'd assumed was a dream -- something about being strapped down in a small metallic room and undergoing an abusive medical examination -- might well have really happened. Soon she became convinced she'd been abducted. Following Strieber's example, she'd gone to a hypnotist, hoping she could fully recollect an event that was now only faintly visible, repressed either because it was too horrifying to remember or because the aliens had induced a state of amnesia. The hypnotist had seemed a bit strange at first, obsessed with language, constantly revising

everything he said, making simple ideas seem incomprehensible. Her initial reaction had been that she wanted to leave and forget the whole thing. But soon she began to enjoy his verbal contortions, casting herself adrift in his words, and the session went quite well. Her memories traveled in several directions at once, each direction constantly revising all the others, until she arrived at what must have been their source, or at least their provisional source. The cone of pale green light had become a sequence of geometric shapes, a rhythmic progression of greens and blues and reds, a pattern that seemed to imply that the way she'd always described herself -- the 'I' she'd built her identity on -- was little more than a stage with painted backdrops, crude lighting effects, and an audience filing out onto a street of restaurants and apartment buildings, traffic lights and taxi cabs, a pattern of shapes and motions whose primary function was improvisation, a means of making sure that her physical senses had a location, and apparently only for less than a minute, replaced by a labyrinth of microcircuitry, a door getting smashed, a shabby collection of furniture forcibly seized, a folded page of dots left unconnected, a mirror left in the basement of an abandoned luncheonette, a cypress tree replacing the savage wind it's normally swayed by, the word 'normally' on a blackboard getting erased, a lecture on class and race, a rhythm of transformation made of geometric shapes in the dark -- and at the end of a corridor, a group of words on a folded page:

As yet, a photograph sidled upward
unwrap of ten, term teal greek, tend tone mind
to implant requisites.

Ducal use inquiry, bequest.

Otherwise fragrance (frequent) dentist cool
prospectively adjure impossible.

The hypnotist looked at these words in deep distress. Since they were clearly in English, and since individual phrases bordered on making sense, he felt forced to confront a pair of possibilities whose implications greatly displeased him. The first of these was that the aliens weren't aliens at all, but people who lived on the earth, concealed in other dimensions, virtual zones that gave them secret access to the deep structures of spoken and written English. The second possibility was that the aliens had been able to monitor the human use of language from their own planet, using various devices that human

science could only dream about, machines that over the years had become a language of their own, a four dimensional syntax making space fold up like a paper swan, making time fold up like a road map stuffed in a glove compartment.

He dismissed the first option because it was too similar to the theories of a well-known ufologist, Jacques Vallee, who proposed that UFOs weren't really from other planets, but instead were the holographic projections of people in other dimensions. The hypnotist didn't so much disagree with Vallee as dislike him personally, for reasons better left in the dark. He dismissed the second option because it implied a contradiction: Why would a race of people capable of monitoring English thousands of light years away not be capable of using it in a comprehensible manner?

This question surprised me. I couldn't see how such an apparently brilliant man could have ignored the obvious possibility that the message had not been generated to make the kind of sense he was looking for. Indeed, it might have been developed as a kind of game, a puzzle based on Jacques Lacan's ideas about language and identity, a sequence of rhythms and motions, verbal sounds interacting, windows becoming elastic, words like microscopic rooms where huge unfocused eyes look in, all designed to set the stage for future visitations, leaving a space to be filled by subsequent UFO penetrations.

When I mentioned these ideas, she told me she'd already come to more or less the same conclusion, and had said so during the session. She'd expected an enthusiastic response from the hypnotist, especially since he'd mentioned Lacan in several of his digressions, talking about linguistic event horizons, gaps in the verbal sequence, coded instructions making windows disappear into windows.

Unfortunately, the hypnotist was horrified, offended that she'd even offered an interpretation, pretending that it was meaningless, not worth his attention, claiming that he could work with her only if she agreed not to speak without permission. But she'd seen through his dismissive postures quickly, telling him that she thought his attitudes were paternalistic, patriarchal, phallogocentric, arguing with him without permission for ninety minutes, a savage debate which ended when he tried in vain to seduce her.

I told her I thought the hypnotist's behavior had been totally unprofessional, that

he sounded like a lot of other professionals I'd heard about and worked with. I was just about to go off on a tedious digression about the emptiness of all professions, about the dubious rituals of legitimation all professions depend on. But I held my tongue, focusing instead on a group of scrambled ideas that made the hypnotist look like a badly polluted beach, like a map in a glove compartment.

Had he been a character in a work of fiction, I might have been tempted to say that he represented mainstream culture, which is, after all, both hypnotic and seductive, to say nothing of being intrusive and abusive. But while such an interpretation might have been consistent with his sexist assumption that *she* was there to seduce *him*, it would have been a reduction of the multi-layered possibilities suggested by any well-made symbol, and would have obscured the fact that on his most basic level the hypnotist, as a character in a fiction, was nothing more than a sign, a set of dark marks on a white page, a mere trace or outline representing a so called person, but opening also toward a huge network of concentric possibilities, including in its arc a broken revolving door in Boston, a Siamese fighting fish assaulting a mirror, a group of mountain gorillas attacking a tank in northern Kenya, an essay on poetics getting ridiculed in a warehouse, a governor getting photographed in high-class Dallas whorehouse, a time machine becoming a pocket watch, a frozen witness, a frozen witness repeating himself, a frozen witness reading a page of symbols trapped in flat white space, a page now heating up and repeating itself, animating itself as if the words had somewhere else to go, as if each word were quickly changing itself to become the next word, the otherwise of as yet, upward sliding toward unwrap, inquiry changing into bequest, a ducal adjuration.

I looked at the message closely, fragrance becoming frequent, the end of this word emerging in the next, becoming dentist, echoing back to tend becoming tone becoming mind, as if it were some sort of serial composition, as if it could implant requisites prospectively, cool as teal, as if the graph in photograph were the reek in greek, not impossible, yet not really possible either, of plus ten becoming often.

Suddenly it was no longer disturbing to me that she'd felt she could tell me anything. I still wasn't sure what to make of the hypnotist's offensive behavior, but it no longer seemed

important. What did seem important was that I didn't want to make any general or theoretical statement about the message, nothing that might reveal something about the nature of the people or beings who'd sent it, if indeed scent was the right word. It even occurred to me that the dimension they lived in had come into being only in response to the reading of the message, that they themselves existed because of the reading, that they might be the words themselves in coded form, and that their existence was constantly being altered by the attention I was giving them, and perhaps also by the attention they were giving me.

This final thought made it clear that any invasion they might have been planning had already been a success. Simply by reading that folded message, I'd made them parts of what I was telling myself about myself, what I was telling myself about the world I perceived, and what I was telling myself about the way I chose to perceive it, as if that choice were no longer mine, as if it never had been. I might have found this transformation intrusive or even abusive. But, as it often turns out, there was no time to think, no time to feel, only time to move on to what the moment was becoming, moving into the words the moment called for.

When we got back to her apartment, she tried to seduce me, and would have succeeded except that I didn't have any condoms. I felt like a fool at first, made stupid excuses. But she told me it didn't make any difference because the whole thing had been contrived, conceived as deliberate artifice. The UFO, the hypnotist, the message, and even the form and content of my responses to them, had simply been parts of her latest performance piece, the documentation of which would soon appear in one of two prestigious downtown magazines--with my permission of course.

Note: for more information, see Peter Ganick's untitled (Generator Press, 1989).

Overleaf

Emily Dickinson's Poem Number 1203 – An Arbitrary Annotation

By Juliana Spahr

Emily Dickinson's Poem number 1203—An Arbitrary Annotation

The Past is

such a curious

Creature

To look her in

the face

A transport may

receipt us

or a disgrace.

Unarmed if any

meet her

I charge Him

her faded

Ammunition

might yet reply

might flee

Rusty still—

destroy

See also—poem no. 1498: "It is the Past's supreme italic / Makes this Present mean"; Ruskin, "It is in the perfection and precision of the instantaneous line that the claim to immortality is laid" ("Of Ideas of Power, as They Are Dependent upon Execution" 21); Shelley, "the future is contained within the present, as the plant within the seed" (481). These writers were of obvious interest to Dickinson, but Dickinson's poems resonate forward to generations beyond their past—Bergson, "Let us free ourselves from the space which underlies the movement in order to consider only the movement itself, the act of tension or extension; in short, pure mobility. . . . Let us fix our attention not on the line as a line, but on the action by which it is traced. . . . We shall have this time a more faithful image of the development of our self in duration" (27, 26, 27); Blaser, "We have on our hands then an instability of forms, an instability of ourselves and an unthought manhood. This proposes simultaneously a death of forms, a return of past form, and a disclosure of unknown forms of thought and experience" (59-60); Piombino, "Because remembering is motile (self-generating), it constantly juxtaposes images and fragments of thought spontaneously into the thought process. For this reason, remembering continually transforms the effect of specific associations and images on the meaning or symbolic values we assign to them as we write and reread what is written" (48).

The oddness of transport as a noun (and opposed to "disgrace") points to a meaning of a knowledge that will change, that in some way is flux. See also on the instability of the word transport—poem 1315: "transport's decom- / position follows— / He is Prism born" (Ruskin writes of Turner's light in "The Hesperid Aegle," "of its light: light not merely diffused, but interpreted; light seen pre-eminently in colour"). Here the word "decomposition" is decomposing to produce "position", but a position that follows the refractions of a prism. And poem 1437: "By transport's / instability / and Doom's / Celerity." Dickinson again enacts the instability of the word "transport" with the alternate ("In transport's Exegesis / And Hope's Neurology").

Here "fly" is placed on a half line between "I charge him" and "Her faded" again script enacting the word as the word "fly" flies off the line. But the importance of these scriptural manipulations goes beyond mere mimesis. "The reading eye does not move only in a linear direction," McGann notes (113). And Johanna Drucker speaks of a visual word that is manipulated: "The visual line strains the literary authority with its vulgarity, its crudeness, its fleshiness which pollutes the material of pure language. Of which there is none. Refusing to stay 'in line,' creating instead, a visual field in which all lines are tangential to the whole, which is, in turn, crested as a figure from their efforts, their direction, their non-alignment" (180-181). Scriptural manipulation, like many other poetic devices—the pun, the rhyme scheme, the rhythmic pattern—is a moment where the word is exposed. To notice the materiality of the word is to be, as Drucker notices, vulgar, crude, fleshy (this might explain why so many interpretative readings of Dickinson ignore the scriptural field of her poems). Dickinson's poetry leads the reader to a new way of reading, a reading eye that moves in many directions, a reading I that is not bound to the limits of the page. McGann writes, "Every text has variants of itself screaming to get out, or antithetical texts waiting to make themselves known. . . . The object of poetry is to display the textual condition. Poetry is language that calls attention to itself, and takes its own textual activities as its ground subject" (10).

Alternates (while frequent in Dickinson's poems, they are often ignored by critics) here add an important note of militancy. "May" turns into the might of "might." "Fly" into "flee"—an action of liberation into an action of fright. "Faded ammunition" turns into "rusty"—the corrosions of time. And this ammunition with "might yet reply" becomes that which "might still—destroy." Alternates can also be read as comments on the poem, complete in themselves (the reply that destroys the limits of the poem).

Work Cited: This method of reading was influenced by Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985. / Bergson, Henri. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. T.E. Hulme. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955. / Blaser, Robin. *Image-Nations 1-22 and The Stadium of the Mirror*. London: The Ferry Press, 1974. / Dickinson, Emily. *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. v. 2. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. / Drucker, Johanna. "The Visual Line." *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*. Ed. Robert Frank and Henry Sayre. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 180-181. / McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. / Piombino, Nick. "Writing and Imaging." *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984. 48-9. / Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters*. Ed. David Barrie. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. / Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. New York: Norton, 1977. 478-508.

Readings & Reviews

LINEN MINUS by Susan
Gevirtz. Avenue B. \$8.00 pap.
1992

If language can dismember the psyche, then the act of dismemberment must be a violent, dramatic one. In Susan Gevirtz's new collection, *Linen Minus*, the rupture of language and psyche is accompanied by Dionysian ecstasy which often astonishes with its fearless shattering of forms and expectations. For example, in "Romansch: the stations of cannonization," Gevirtz underscores and problematizes relationships between the body, text, and intention:

nothing of the soft tissue holy
intentions davor davor left "the
seduction of having oneself
dismembered alive for others" (12)

This poem, which deals with issues of marginalization and linguistics, refers to Romansch, a language spoken in only a small part of Switzerland. Of course, to talk about Romansch's "stations of cannonization" makes a nice play, with "cannon" giving rise to associations of violent disruption, and "canon" referring to a literary canon, or a state of being (sainthood) which can only be achieved after death. Further, "cannon" echoes the word "canton," which is how the Swiss designate their provinces. Thus Gevirtz makes an interesting comment on the nature of language by suggesting that we are seduced by the spectacle of

watching something die, even if that something happens to be the symbol-system (their language) of a people and not the individual bodies that comprise that group.

If language can die, then how do we understand when and why the collapse began? Gevirtz suggests that language and its linguistic structures can be used in and against itself ("In which / second language / shall we stop / to forget them?" (13) she writes in "Romansch"). What happens then is a poetics that eulogizes what once existed -- where, when, and how -- and analyzes the texture of newly-imposed nothingness which fills up the "orchestrate silence of a house."

Linen Minus reminds one of George Bataille's *Tears of Eros* or Michel Foucault's *Sun/veillir et punir*, where vivisection of the body is necessary in order to divine a way to achieve self-transcendence. How does one achieve self-overcoming, or manage to override the symbols of authority that lodge themselves in the consciousness and act as a refraining force on creativity and adaptability? How does one proceed, once the panopticon devised by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century and scrutinized by Foucault has been firmly established in the middle of one's waking thoughts? Sadly, Foucault and Bataille both experimented with methods that resulted in physical trauma -- their attempts to transcend either discipline-and-punish authority structures or culturally constructed eroticized thanatos aesthetics led to their death, scandalized their achievements, and in an ironic triumph of the systems they sought to escape. In *Linen Minus*, Gevirtz takes the body itself as a point of departure. For convenience, one could construct a Nietzschean-based system of oppositions, where an Apollonian aesthetic incorporates system-building, and thereby privileges notions of

order and logic. The Apollonian aesthetic opposes a Dionysian one of system-rupturing, which is characterized by chaos, blood, and abandon. Gevirtz takes the Apollonian and the Dionysian and creates an exercise in thought which revolves around the problem of representing change and transformation. If we continue the dialectical structure, then Gevirtz's exercise in thought becomes one of positioning destructive chaos versus cultural constructs: "...restoration of that first... / her passage through ... / graspings and droppings ... coming / back... paper-scattered / lamplit circle .. as the / centre ..." (19) (quotation marks and ellipses Gevirtz's)

Gevirtz places self-creation at the center of the poetics. In "Caldera," using a nature-based paradigm of representation allows one to posit that a volcano could represent context, "The climate of their country / spilled contents of a broken jar / carnival of lights above the sea / In a meltime they rim an / island (55)" writes Gevirtz. If the caldera constitutes the milieu of the poetic process, it forms the constraints upon what Lloyd Bitzer would have as the "rhetorical situation." Thus, it is the environment, or the context that forces rhetorical strategies to come to the surface, and begin their reifying and rigidifying tasks.

How does the reader detect the context's effect upon the reading? How does the milieu work its almost imperceptible effects on the reader's strategies for seeing and interpreting form?

Gevirtz posits relationships of text that call into question the notion that there is a neat cause-and-effect solution for this issue. Instead, degree to which the context affects the reader has a lot to do with scales of perception. Gevirtz questions how the scales work: "background detected / relics of infancy / subatomic scale" (55).

Also, what do you exclude or rule out? "imperfect origin vacuum genesis / as we crawl back into / longevity out of which came // the first equation" (56). The scales of perception revolve around naming and identity issues as well. In *Linen Minus* this concern is constructed so that the reader becomes as engaged as Gevirtz in examining identity (or lack of identity). Does nebulous identity have an impact on meaning? If these issues are not resolvable, they are at least provocative, and in considering them, the reader can begin to develop more strategies for reading.

—SUSAN SMITH NASH

HER ANGEL by Karen Kelley.
Singing Horse Press, \$7.50. 1992

While reading Karen Kelley's first collection of poems, *Her Angel*, a maxim from poet Peter Redgrove kept coming to mind: "Depression is withheld knowledge." The crux of Redgrove's statement—that withheld knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, manifests physically—seemed to present itself as a point of departure in *Her Angel*, whereby a kind of self-combustion of bodily pressure (withheld knowledge) turns itself out into the corpus of the text.

Her Angel is a dialogue between body and psyche, oscillating unabashedly from wry, self-reflexive humor and idiomatic phrases (akin to troubadour and blues narratives along the contours of the sexual landscape) to a dense, organic use of imagery in which the text moves as a body moves, articulating subtleties and layerings—a masterful use of 'no ideas but in things.'

Despite the book's massive psychological excavating, Kelley avoids locking herself into a confessional strain by tentacling out with equal insight into the

social, political and sexual contexts in which she writes. Her poetry is a braid of her angel and the warped lenses of billboards: "a mirror all over...tethered to this stake."

In the first section, *The Boston Poems*, Kelley's poetry moves cautiously, ambulating around the fringes of the book's more engaging centers; it's as if she's revved the engine but idles here through a series of pieces that lend little insight other than to contextualize and better understand from what distances the later poems have traveled: "I was not even sure what I hoped to gain—perhaps a certain shallowness that / would make me restless. A concern for surface was inherent, though not yet / articulated."

By the end of *The Boston Poems*, Kelley has migrated toward herself as her 'primary resource,' as it were, shifting away from 'him,' or rather through him via herself: "suddenly I realized: he's mirroring me."

The second section, also *Her Angel*, is five meditations, or encounters with her angel, from its "siege on her bedpost night after night" to a "seduction by visions, secret visions gaining substance at these heights, turning into what / she swims in, what she cannot face." Her angel, like Rimbaud's bridegroom in hell, is a muse of a darker nature than what 'angel' implies—a kind of wild (er) ness of the imagination whose "hide is a mirror, a portion of space with / indefinite boundaries." This is not a tour through hell behind Roman robes, but a descent inaugurated by a symbolic death in the hands of her angel who has "cut off all of her limbs and thrown them in the / water, and lighted a fire beneath the kettle and boiled them."

The result of this imaginative assimilation is "The Red Snake We Woke," a long poem that

twists forward into unconscious and preconscious territories, as well as through a series of sexual encounters in which the others' identities constantly shed and merge through historical, archetypal and personal masks. Kelley's observations in this piece, while patently surreal, remain in full control of the so-called 'objective' world, unlike a surrealism in which the thing-itself is lost or glossed over by hyperboles and abstractions:

My mother makes the characteristic cry / of a submissive animal / invoking heaven. / Poisonous. / She makes me think of the bursting forth / of large groups of fins, gills, / cartilaginous skeletons swimming together / in shallow waters, turbulence in the atmosphere causing the sparkling / of lustrous white scales, a boiling / like the winging of birds' bodies unlocking / trails of smoke as they turn / in a threatening sky.

The final section, *Virtual Realities*, is a set of ten dream-like narratives studded with boldface print where the 'voice' seems to rise along the poem's funhouse-circuit, its mobius strip where "You / come around the corner, carrying a large suitcase. You look like the / space for a ship between two piers by moonlight, then like a MILK- / PAIL, then again a port and again a bucket."

These poems possess a cinematic-splice feel and a theatrical quality, as if one is seated before a montage of burlesque images in which characters shed personae in a kind of satire on the plasticity of human fantasy. For example, in "Deconstructing the Queen," the 'you' to whom each poem is addressed ('Anywoman?' 'Anyreader?') undergoes a series of metamorphoses that seems to parallel historical (as well as parody academic) changes of the 'queen'/anywoman, until she is merely a catatonic arrangement

of "FACE POWDER,
COFFEE, AND CREAM/
CAKES."

Reading *Her Angel*, one follows Kelley through a sort of ritual-dance: from a hesitancy, or withholding, into a poetry that is in-bodied. In a culture where the exploration and knowledge of one's own body (and, therefore, psyche) is taboo, Kelley's angel is a herald of a bold and ancient sort, slipping past that other angel at psyche's gate and momentarily reclaiming the body. One wonders where her angel will lead her next.

— DON FEATHERSTON

STRONG PLACE, by Tim Dlugos, introduced by David Trinidad, Amethyst Press, 1992, \$9.95

After the publication of *Entre Nous* (1981), Tim Dlugos was unable to find a publisher for the poems in this collection, written between 1981-5. Since they're in every way superior to the earlier work, it's hard to see just why *Strong Place* was systematically rejected by a round of printers. Maybe because Dlugos was a Republican? But probably because he was gay. I understand, for example, that of dozens of young poets invited to the recent conference at Buffalo, "Writing from the New Coast," only one identifies herself as queer. Could that really be so? Dlugos died two years ago today, and I remember his obituary in the *Chronicle*, the reprint from *The New York Times*, a slice of text that seemed to elude his personality more cleverly even than most of them do.

When I met Tim Dlugos, I was in grad school. He, Michael Lally, Eileen Myles and Jane DeLynn came to our campus in a bunch, a glamorous, drunk bunch, redolent of Manhattan high life, sophisticated, vivid, strongly colored. Tim was pretty absent. Sarcastic. "Prick," I mumbled.

Much later I realized it was because both of us were drunk at the time. Strong drink's a screen behind which all kinds of intimate interchanges tip and bow, figures from a minuet. A year later I read with him myself — still have the gala poster from this event, somewhere in my files — "GAY" written all over it in glitter, as though it were a word freshly coined, sassy and neologistic. Here Tim opened up, warm, helpful, enthusiastic, mordant: he was my man. When he came to San Francisco in 1990 to partake in the OutWrite Conference, and to read at the "Compact" event at Southern Exposure, I hadn't seen him in years, not since he got sober. Guess I should have realized this would be his last reading here in California — but I hoped not — but wrong. Guess AIDS is too powerful, though it won't always be, we hope. The poems in *Strong Place* gain from the dramatic unity of their conception: the localized, benign Brooklyn neighborhood where they were written, and the 12-step precepts, often mocked and sometimes dulsome, actually worked in this case, sharpened Tim's writing like a whetstone on a blade. The happy frivolity ("Gilligan's Island") of his earlier work became the somber vitality of the new. This is "Not Stravinsky":

Dark-eyed boy in tight designer jeans and sneakers on your way / from basketball practice at Bishop Somebody High, I // don't know what you're playing on your Walkman but it probably is / not Stravinsky.

Within this discourse an overload of irony awaits, deadly, threatening as radium. These are the nineties now, when we're all going to learn the value of sincerity, so inevitably Dlugos' work shows its age, wobbles a bit. David Trinidad's introduction to *Strong Place*, though un-

necessarily formalist, is sharp, clear and fierce, like the translucent prose of Willa Cather and never less than moving. His argument, like mine, is a skein of memories. But what *about* this? 'Unlike many contemporary poets who fashionably strive to obscure narrative, or to *not* make sense, Tim never abandoned his story. 'I risk playing the fool,' he says in 'The Morning,' 'because this is a world I am creating, / not "text" or "slice of life," and old contexts / don't hold.' I only wonder if these lines really mean what David takes them to mean? Perhaps they only intend to mean what he takes them to mean? I'll take the other tack and say that *Strong Place* is a text I hope finds its way into your hands. It's not easy to forget a writing of such verve, dexterity and ambition. Even its few failures partake of community, where you think, I know what he wanted and I want it too. Please note, this book may be a little hard to locate, because its publisher has AIDS now. His health has caused him to abandon his business affairs.

Thus a bitterness, mine, occludes this healthy lovely air, that we call cultural critique.

— KEVIN KILLIAN

Books Received

Anne-Marie Albiach: *Vocative Figure* (trns. Anthony Barnett and Joseph Simas). Allardyce Book, U.K. 1992.

Alba Amoia: *Feodor Dostoevsky* (Continuum Books) 1993.

Ivan Arguelles: *"That" Goddess* (Pantograph Press) 1992.

Dawn Michelle Baude: *Gaffiot Exquis*, 1993.

Brita Bergland: *The Rebirth of the Older Child* (Burning Deck) 1993.

Ulla Berkowitz: *Josef is Dying* (The Post-Apollo Press) 1992.

Greg Boyd: *Carnival Aptitude* (Asylum Arts) 1993.

David Bromige: *The Harbormaster of Hong Kong* (Sun & Moon) 1993.

Lee Ann Brown: *Crush* (Leave Books) 1993.

Cydney Chadwick: *Dracontic Nodes* (Texture Press) 1993.

Cydney Chadwick: *Enemy Clothing* (Five Fingers Press) 1993.

Jean Daive: *A Lesson in Music* (trns. Julie Kalendeck). Burning Beck 1992.

Darin De Stefano: *Hazarding a Glance* (System Zero) 1993.

Johan de Wit: *Linear A* (Hillside Books, U.K.) 1992. *Rose Poems* (Actual Size, U.K.) 1986. *Illusions* (Writers Forum, U.K.) 1991. *Metropolitan Drinking*

Fountain & Cattle Trough (Microbrigade, U.K.) 1992. *Spread Eagle* (Torque Press, U.K.) 1989. *The Green Man* (Hillside Books, U.K.) 1988.

Ray DiPalma: *Numbers and Tempers* (Sun & Moon) 1993.

Mary Du Passage: *4 Squares Declare 5* (The Groundwater Press) 1992.

Marguerite Duras: *Agatha/Savannah Bay* (trns. Howard Limoli). The Post-Apollo Press, 1992.

Ed Foster: *The Space Between Her Bed and Clock* (Norton Coker) 1993.

Lawrence S. Friedman: *William Golding* (Continuum Books) 1993.

Karen Elizabeth Gordon: *The Transitive Vampire* (Pantheon) 1993.

Michael Gottlieb: *New York* (The Figures) 1993.

Andrew Joron: *Science Fiction* (Pantograph Press) 1992.

Nathaniel Mackey: *School of Udhra* (City Lights) 1993

Jim McCrary: *The Book of Arrogance* (Road Kill Editions) 1993.

Susan Smith Nash: *Grammar of the Margin Road* (Leave Books) 1993.

Claire Needell: *Not a Balancing Act* (Burning Deck) 1993.

Jena Osman: *Amblyopia* (Avenue B) 1993.

Ron Padgett: *Ted* (The Figures) 1993.

Nick Piombino: *The Boundry of Blur* (Roof) 1993.

Nick Piombino: *Two Essays* (Leave Books) 1992.

Ray Ragosta: *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Burning Deck) 1993.

Stephen Ratcliffe: *Selected Letters* (Zasterle Press) 1993

Pam Rehm: *The Garment in Which no One Had Slept* (Burning Deck) 1993.

Rena Rosenwasser: *Unplace/Place* (Leave Books) 1992.

Douglas N. Rothschild: *Lit/ Writ 103* (Bridgeage Review) 1992.

Nancy Shaw: *Scoptocratic* (ECW Press, Toronto) 1992.

Susan M. Shultz: *Another Childhood* (Leave Books) 1993.

Thomas Taylor: *JFK* (Texture Press) 1993.

Terminal Velocities. Andrew Joron, Ed. (Pantograph Press) 1993.

Craig Van Riper: *Making the Path While You Walk* (Sagittarius Press) 1993.

Rosmarie Waldrop: *Lawn of Excluded Middle* (Tender Buttons) 1993.

Roseanne Wasserman: *The Lacemakers* (Gnosis Press) 1992.

Why Project.: Thomas Taylor, Ed. (Anabasis Press) 1992.

World's Edge: Sherry Reniker, Ed. (Open Meeting Books) 1992.

Journals Received

Arshile #1. \$ 8.00. Ed: Mark Salerno. P.O. Box 26366, Los Angeles, CA 90026.

Cabaret Vert (Third Edition). \$7.00. Ed: Beth Learn. P.O. Box 157 Stn. P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S7.

Caliban # 12. \$ 8.00. Ed: Lawrence Smith. P.O. Box 561, Lauguna Beach, CA 92652.

Central Park #22 "Childhood Sexual Abuse". Eds: Eve Ensler and Stacey Sharader. \$7.50. P.O. Box 1446. NY, NY 10023

Die Young #3. \$3.00. Eds: Skip Fox and Jesse Glass. 420 Orangewood, Lafayette, LA 70503.

Elephant (August 1993). \$5.00. Ed: Douglas Messerli. 6026 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90036.

Heaven Bone #10. \$10.00. Ed: Steven Hirsh. P.O. Box 486. Chester, NY 10918.

Hole #4. \$8.00 (2 issues). Eds: Louis Cabri & Rob Manery. 22-191 McLeod St., Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0Z8.

Lift #12. \$16.00/12 Issues. Ed: Joseph Torra. 10-Rear Oxford St. Somerville, MA 02143.

Long News in the Short Century #3. \$5.00. Ed: Barbara Henning. P.O. Box 150-455, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

Lower Limit Speech. #5, 6, others (no price given). Ed: A.L. Neilson. 725 E. Taylor, San Jose, CA 95112.

Mirage #4/ *Period(ical)* #14-#15. \$3.00. Eds: Kevin Killian & Dodie Bellamy. 1020 Minna, San Francisco, CA 94103.

New American Writing #10. \$6.00. Eds: Paul Hoover & Maxine Chernoff. 2920 West Pratt, Chicago, IL 60645.

Object #1. \$5.00. Eds: Kim Rosenfield and Rob Fitterman. 229 Hudson St. #4, NY, NY 10013.

Open Letter Vol. 8# 2-4. \$6.00. Ed: Frank Davey. 449 Dufferin Ave., London, Ontario, N6B 2A1.

Poetic Briefs. \$8.00 for series. Eds: Elizabeth Burns and Jefferson Hansen. 404 Jersey St. (Rear) Buffalo, NY 14213.

Raddle Moon #12. \$6.00. Ed: Susan Clark. 2239 Stephens St. Vancouver, B.C. V6K 3W5.

Serie d' Ecriture #7. \$6.00. Ed: Rosmarie Waldrop. 71 Elmgrove, Ave., Providence, RI 02906

Situation #2. \$2.00. Ed: Mark Wallace. 82 Fargo Ave. #3 Buffalo, NY 14201-1138.

Talisman #10 "The Gustaf Sobin Issue". \$5.00. Ed: Ed Foster. P.O. Box 1117, Hoboken, NJ 07030.

Tartine (Mars-Juin 1993). 9f. Ed: Catherine Lorin. 1 rue Ferdinand Duval, 75004 Paris, France.

Texture #4. \$6.00. Ed: Susan Smith Nash. 3760 Cedar Ridge Drive, Norman, OK 73072.

That Vol. 2 #1-6. Eds: Stephen Dignazio & Stephen Ellis. P.O. Box 85 Peachem, VT 05862.

The Impercipient #3. No Price Given. Ed: Jennifer Moxley. 61 East Manning St. Providence, RI 02906-4008.

Writing #28. \$6.00. Eds: Jeff Derksen & Nancy Shaw. P.O. Box 69609 Station K, Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4W7.