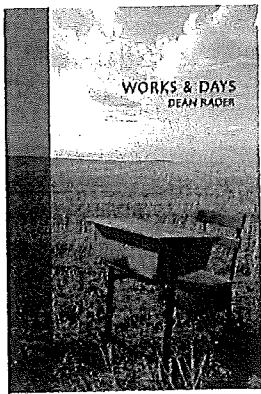


BOOK IT!

in Section II. Overall, the tone of the book is subdued, appropriately for its subject matter. I may have liked a few pieces to break up the understated mood, but this goes back to my first comment, that the book is cohesive. Cohesion is achieved, in large part, through the poet's choice to stay within a selected range of color, here it is subtly grey-green-brown. Nonetheless, I would enjoy hearing Kaufman's work in a larger spectrum, as I am sure she is capable of writing when she moves outside of the elegiac frame.

WORKS & DAYS



DEAN RADER (SAN FRANCISCO)

Works & Days by Dean Rader. (New *Odyssey Series*, Truman State University Press, Kirksville, MO: 2010), 40 poems, 96 pages, \$24.95. Winner of the 2010 T.S. Eliot Poetry Prize, judged by Claudia Keelan. With cover art, "Desk," by Devon OpdenDries/Getty Images. ISBN: 978-1-935503-08-8. tsup.truman.edu.

Oh, golly, what a bunch of fun Dean Rader's *Works & Days* is. To come upon such a book that makes me think, laugh, feel, and hear language anew! Where to begin?

There is nothing predictable in this book: that's the first thing. The volume opens with "Traveling to Oklahoma for my Grandmother's Funeral, I Write a Poem About Wallace Stevens," and places us, with the poet/narrator at Stevens' grave in Hartford, then shifts to an in-flight scene en route to a funeral, returns to Stevens, back to grandma's funeral, and in the interim, engages in a contemplation—both somber and devilish—about fellow passengers in that "soft silver coffin" in the sky and their (our) vulnerability as individuals aging toward death and the possibility we all might die sooner than we think, i.e., as in a plane crash:

**The elderly woman next to me
In 7D has been peeking at this poem
For several minutes.**

**I don't mind,
Because the next line is this:
She will die before I do,**

**As will the man two rows in front
In 5C and his wife in 5D. But then again,
All of us on the plane could get there**

**In seconds. In the reverse burial that is this sky,
We die forward into the nothing that is not yet revealed.**
(from "Traveling to Oklahoma for my Grandmother's Funeral,
I Write a Poem About Wallace Stevens")

Rader does his fair share of contemplating the life and death issues, but mostly his mind strays over being-and-nothingness struggles of identity and degrees of consciousness. The poems have their deadly serious side, but overall the playfulness and experimentation—in terms of ideas as well as the forms the poems take—win us over. As I was reading the book, I kept thinking of Lucretius' exhortation to his goddess, that he be able to deliver his facts in honeyed words: poetry doesn't get much better than when narration and music, reality and imagination, seriousness and giddiness all hook up.

A sequence of poems are entitled "Self Portraits" though I'm not sure what is especially self-reflective about them. In "Self Portrait: Rejected Inaugural," the predominant voice is a "we":

**The land was land before we were us.
Our regret, freshly cut, clumps in the front yard.**

**History, memory's buttonhole, needs a new suit:
Its shoes, scuffed and spit-shined, wait by the door.**

We wear ourselves as though it means something,

With the idea of "inaugural" and the likelihood that these poems may have been written during the last presidential election, there is a sense the "I" is in fact the "we" of the American people. The blurring or confusion of an I/you or a I/we or a you/we plays havoc through the book, and becomes a kind of extended leitmotif through poems featuring the characters of "Frog" and "Toad." In the first of this series, "Frog and Toad Confront the Alterity of Otherness,"—post-colonial grad-school gibberish if I have ever heard it—there is a gutsy humor in the poem's interplay between two amphibian identities. These frog-and-toad pieces serve as comic relief, perhaps a bit of nose-thumbing at linguistic contortions of the post-modern age that leave us commoners cold, and out in the cold, making us think our "common-speech" is dull-witted while layers of abstractions are profound.

BOOK IT!

Rader can deliver parodies on poems about writing poetry as well as a cleanly written love poem:

**I want to know the word
For your back in the morning,**

**The noun for the sound you make
When my tongue goes along your breast.**

**The verb for my mouth
On yours.**

(from "Love Poem in 5 Couplets + 1 Line")

He uses most of the poet's toolkit—the ancient art of repetition, call and response two-liners, Anglo-Saxon alliteration, dashes, italics, ellipses, and brackets—and when those do not prove to be enough, he invents some new tools for doing what he wants in order to make us see poems afresh. Don't ask me what using three colons at the end of one line accomplishes or why he likes to use a blank underline _____ in several poems, but because he has produced many poems so competently, I bow to his right to challenge my inner English-teacher.

Works & Days may not be the best book for someone relatively new to reading poetry, or unversed in the canon of (in particular) Western literature. After all, the title nods to one of the classics of that canon (and, yes there is a poem written in direct homage to that ancient Greek author who is not Homer). These are not accessible poems in the style of a Billy Collins or Mary Oliver—and, don't get me wrong, that is not a criticism, for those and other easy-to-read poets have brought poetry a revived audience. Neither are Rader's poems mind-fucks in the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet tradition (you know you've got a problem when you have to describe your work by such a catchy visual epithet!). Rader is for the rest of us: those who have read a lot, know our literary history, cherish its best and brightest, but also love pop culture, "Dexter," "True Blood," "Mad Men," and even "Criminal Minds" and "Project Runway," as well as poets as crazily different as Stephen Dobyns, W.S. Merwin, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Coleman Barks, Yusef Komunyakaa, Bruce Weigel, Brian Turner, Donald Justice, Chana Bloch, May Swenson, Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Waniak Nelson and Robert Frost, and refuse to give any of them up because they are overly- or underly-accessible.

Rader is a model of madman freedom that has been persuasively bent to the craftsman's bridle. In the poems in *Works & Days*, we can travel from this:

**No one spreads your butter like Toad.
His heart is jelly, his tongue is jam.
He'll nibble the crust right off of your bread.
Give him your fruitcake, and he'll give you his ham.
No one spreads your butter like Toad.**
(from "Frog and Toad Sing the Birthday Blues: 38")

to this:

Corrido for the Lost Girls of Juarez

**Of the men who take them we say:
If not in this world, then the next**

**Of the men who take them we say:
May the body you needed never be yours**

**Of the men who take them we say:
May your best moment come when your cock turns to
dust!**

**Of the men who take them we say:
May we find you before the devil knows you're dead**

and to this:

**And if the mirror asks nothing of the face
fixed in its gaze but a moment of clarity? To see
is to be seen, but to reflect is to enter that space
in which the self doubles down. Someone said let be
be the finale of seem, as though existence and
perception form the wishbone of knowledge.**

(from "Contingency Triptych: Three Self Portraits,
section II. As Robert Hayden to Michael Jackson")

MY YOUTH AS A TRAIN

MICHAEL ROTHENBERG (GUERNEVILLE)



My Youth as a Train by Michael Rothenberg.
(FootHills Publishing, P.O. Box 68, Kanona,
NY 14856: 2010), 16 poems, 80 pages, ISBN
978-0-941053-97-6, \$16. Cover art, "Enigma
#4, by Jim Spitzer; cover design by Terri
Carrion. www.foothillspublishing.com.

Although *My Youth as a Train* doesn't particularly deal with the author's "youth," it does recreate the experience of witnessing life through the window of a speeding train, as so much of what is written here has that telegraphic, dropped articles (a, an, the, etc.) urgency that Whitman and many of the Beats are known for. But the book also has something of the flavor of Vladimir Nabokov's amazing tour-de-force in *Lolita* as the author encapsulates an American panorama as his character Humbert Humbert takes his teenage concubine on a mid-1950s dash across the continent.



BAY AREA POETS SEASONAL REVIEW

Poets in Season Fall 2010 Vol. 6 No. 1

The BAY AREA POETS SEASONAL REVIEW is pleased to announce Jack Foley's long-awaited time-line of California literary history from 1940-2005. We are grateful for the right to reprint an excerpt from this significant new work.

VISIONS & AFFILIATIONS

A CALIFORNIA LITERARY TIME LINE:

POETS & POETRY: 1940-2005

by Jack Foley

*"the twentieth century in all its confused
and troubled eloquence"*

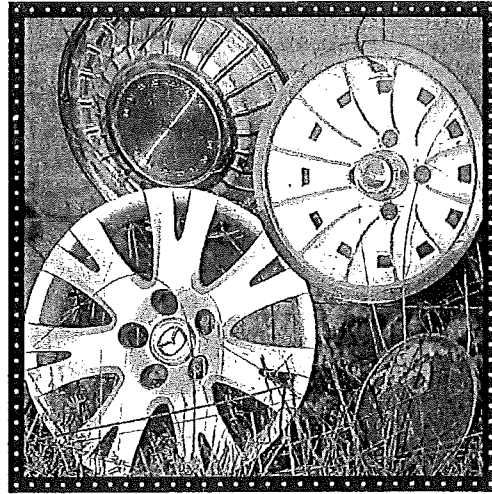
From the foreword by Ivan Argüelles

Jack Foley's Time Line is both a chronicle, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, and also something much more, something that resembles the Camera Eye of John Dos Passos' *USA*. Taking us year by year from 1940 to 2005, Foley chronicles not just the development of poetry during those years, but much more significantly, the relevance of that poetry within the larger cultural framework.

From Poetry at the Edge of the Continent

In 1940, when this time line begins, California's image had changed. The state had moved out of its early provincialism and had begun to take its place in the nation as a whole. In *The Parade's Gone By*, film historian Kevin Brownlow tells us that in 1920 "film people were called 'movies' by Hollywood residents, who were unaware that the term referred to the product, not to the personnel." By 1940, no one confused the "movies" with the actors and technical people anymore.

In 1915, the Panama-Pacific Exposition—a celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal and a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean—had kept the state of California and the city of San Francisco in the public eye; twenty-four years later, San Francisco had its very own World's Fair. *continued on page 51*



"Litto's Hubcap Ranch,"
photograph
by Donald
Kinney
(Fairfax,
Marin County)

www.photoarrow.net; photoarrow@comcast.net
<http://aphotoaday.blogspot.com>

FENCE ON THE POPE VALLEY ROAD

I'm hanging on a fence,
Glinting in strong country light.
It's sun-hot, and my folds
Collect dust and sweet pollen.

No more speeding round.
No more stink of the road.
No more burning heat
Of rubber on asphalt.

I flew off a wheel at a bump,
And my round edge
Is a little gouged.

Hands found me in dry grass
And drove off with me
Riding without spinning!
Hands hung me on this fence
Where the ranch meets the road.

For an eighth of a mile,
Hundreds of us shine
On barbed wire
Strung between oaks:
A thin veil
Of flashing gauze,
A Milky Way of round stars,
A frozen moment in
A spinning plate act.

We are, however,
Mainly, a wall of former hubcaps,
Slightly flapping in disdain
At passing cars.
Preening for cyclists
Who fly by like birds.

—Lawrence N. DiCostanzo (Berkeley)