

Critical Notes from the D-Bag

Contributed by DeWitt Brinson

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Hearth by Simon Pettet, Talisman House, December 2008:

The first thing I noticed about Simon Pettet is he doesn't waste words. The title of his collected works of poetry, *Hearth*, at once means a home, a contained fire, and the center of his creativity. Simon's poems trick you with brevity, lull you with common imagery, burn you with their passion. Read the title again, it holds the words Hear, Heart, Earth, and Art--how far can a word be pushed before it pushes back? Fire in large works is a release; fire in small texts is an explosion.

Many of his poems lack titles. This instance of something floats on a page and reads

"The just hand
Is a precious ointment
And the evidence of scars
Is not itself proof.."

Who wrote the book
(about staying alive
In the body)

You did

The italic *You* leaps out as an accusation and argument. The word is forcefully bent into a shape outside the rest of the words. This is the space Simon occupies and his works reflect. They are interesting because he sees the world as he is a part of its structure and still somewhere outside of its expected pattern--a red hat in a sea of black. "He speaks loudly and of himself / As ivy clings to the instrument."

To order *Hearth*, click on this link <http://www.spdbooks.org/Products/19601/hearth.aspx>

The Amputee's Guide to Sex by Jillian Weise, Soft Skull Press, February 2007

Jillian explains the birth defects which lead so early in life to the loss of her leg in this way:
and full. The cloud was yawning, breathing.

When the body came out twisted, six toes
on one foot, a club foot, no tibia,
no fibula, lungs trapped by the rib cage
what explanation could be given
more than why we see clouds differently?
Why some are rabbit ears
while others are the tails of lions?

This excerpt, taken from "Body as Cloud," is part of the first section of her book "Translating the Body." The book has two other sections, "Help Your Physician Understand Your Pain" and "Of Holman." The physicians and surgeons stay mainly in their place, but the Holman of the beginning—an Adonis with a dead, arsonist ex-girlfriend, Noma—changes in his own section into another failed relationship. So, if this book were thought of as a person then the head of the book introduces us to the body, the torso tells us of its doctoral antagonists, and the last leg is devoted to loss.

I couldn't help reading this book as a way of understanding its title which sounds like a lost appendage to the Karma Sutra. I found it in "How the Dumb Were Granted the Right to Have Sex", where Jillian appends a note, from the Disability History Timeline, "In 1575 Lasso, a Spanish lawyer, concluded that those who learn to speak are no longer dumb and should have rights to progeniture." These poems are meant to rewrite social laws. Not necessarily laws everyone follows and not any written law, but ones most of us feel. "Before normal, there was ideal", and hasn't recent art reflected this? We went from the Statue of David to depictions of Campbell's Soup. There's something sexy about a woman removing her leg because it seems so exotic. When you're the exotic one, exotic can be another word for wrong.

To order *The Amputee's Guide to Sex*, click on this link <http://www.softskull.com/detailedbook.php?isbn=1-933368-52-7>

King Baby by Lia Purpura, Alice James Books, April 2008:

Lia Purpura is one of the newest members of the Alice James Books (AJB) crew. AJB is a collective of people who come together and try to keep poetry flowing in the analog form of books. Not exactly hippies, not inexactly hippies, through various means of support from donations and people who care, AJB consists of those who love poetry and the poets who have been selected for publication with them. So, being published by Alice James Books also means you've become the newest member of the staff.

Lia joins the cult by taking creationism into her own hands with King Baby a collection of poems attending to that power we give to objects and how we create our own mythology.

King Baby is a real object, not some idea. Some found relic, hopefully from those mountain days when people were known to toss select babies into rivers. The object becomes an emblem floating down Pupura's poems representing everyone from Christ to her son to her fears. The words she's chosen to solidify on the page dance outside of diction in tiny tribe of compelling, indefinable ways of an intuitive poet.

Once I was walking in the cold
and the light
kept leading, leaden
leading, leaden like a chant
for snow to come and knock out
school for another day.

The mix of the striking and mundane imagery propels the work into a mystical climax. This leather doll becomes a leather myth: a symbol for what cannot be understood, what must be intuited from a life where things seem, for no particular reason, to happen and not happen.

Does the world need another fetish? Maybe. The world doesn't know what it needs. Maybe there will be a new cult of King Baby or a new cult of Alice James Books. Read good poems and then we'll just tell the world what it needs.

To order King Baby, click on this link <https://ssl7.secureddomain.net/alicejamesbooks-org/cart/>