

begins: "They said it was a heart / Attack but it weren't no / Heart attack even though / We all seen the Rescue van." The nonstandard speech and neglected punctuation give this poem its appealing flavor. Even the poems that are not monologues carry a similar rhythm.

Arnold works under the Wordsworthian banner, using "the real language of men." His poems prove how affective a book can be when manner matches matter, form connects content. He knows his tools and built a book to live in. *Once in Vermont* is solid, dividing, strong, affirming, like a stone wall.

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The Poet as Spy: The Life and Wild Times of Basil Bunting.
Keith Aldritt.

Aurum Press, 1998.

221 pages. \$19.95 (hardback).

Reviewed by Jeffery Beam

The life of Basil Bunting, whose poem "Briggflatts" has been hailed as the greatest long poem produced in Britain since Eliot's "Four Quartets," reads like the best nineteenth-century adventure story. Born in 1900, as a young man he found himself associating with Virginia Woolf and other Bloomsburyites ("snobbish" he called them), and in France with writers such as Hemingway (whom he viewed as a "bully" and a "vulgarian"), Tristan Tzara, Ford Madox Ford, and Ezra Pound.

A close friendship with Pound led to his early poetry. By World War II, after time in North Africa, Italy, and Normandy, he had become a Royal Air Force spy, an experience that enriched and heightened his exotic yet earthy poetic mind, maturing and clarifying his personality and intelligence. Uncelebrated as a poet during most of his life, he maintained, however, through Pound's friendship, connections with poets such as Yeats, Eliot, and Louis Zukofsky, and editors such as Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*. By the age of 65, he was a nobody, retiring from an obscure, unfulfilling job as a journalist in Newcastle. At the rediscovery of his work in the 60s, after a 15-year period of no writing, Bunting took up writing again and soon produced his masterpiece, "Briggflatts." He died in 1985 having become one of the pre-eminent poets of our time, showered with numerous accolades and honors.

Bunting's social activism and peregrinations reveal a man who understood the rhythms and conflicts of the century and was able to translate his wisdom into a verbal music so prodigious and unique as to transform the English and American poetic landscape – an influence yet to be felt completely. Aldritt's biography does considerable justice to his life and work.

This excerpt from an early poem, "Villon," ably describes Bunting's ultimate achievement:

Precision clarifying vagueness;
boundary to a wilderness
of detail: chisel voice

smoothing the flanks of noise;
catalytic making whisper and whisper
run together like two drops of quicksilver

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Nothing Doing.

Cid Corman.

New Directions, 1999.

153 pages. \$13.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jeffery Beam

Cid Corman has written thousands of poems. He first came into his own in the 1950s, and through his magazine *Origin*, defined one of the great Modernists streams woven from the Black Mountain poets and the Objectivists. His subjects – insights into human frailty, feeling, and thought – make poetry prized for its restrained and subtle musics, its gentle yet piercing wit, and its honesty. I can think of only a few other poets whose work will outlive our contemporary biases to rest among the masterpieces of our time. In *Nothing Doing* Corman selects poems from the 1980s and 90s. He proves, once again, that small poems, though of seemingly small moments, can fill with momentous implication.

Writing of such quantity is bound to fall flat every now and again, and very very occasionally Corman's poems do. Emerson once said that "a metre-making argument . . . makes a poem, – a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing." The intelligent interiors of Corman's poems breathe wide. *Nothing Doing* contains tender elegies to love, family, and friends, as well as others of ethical, almost Confucian reserve, inhabited by a lithe and Zen-like happiness:

Socrates

clearly could
neither read

nor write but

could walk and
talk – fuck – and

drink hemlock.

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