

poetically distant from Virgil. While the *Aeneid* treats the matter of loss in a sustained narrative, Bezner's style is lyric, achieving a compression that is reminiscent of Asian rather than Roman poetics. Bezner's short lines scatter his thoughts. He leaves fine, empty space on his page. The book's final lines read ("Wherever"):

Always with me.
No burden.

This koan-like paradox pares down to its most basic the pervading mood of *Wherever*. Bezner's most consistent burden is his lack of burden.

Bezner's poetics operates not by narration, but by repetition. The book returns again and again to a few images: bare trees, snow-covered landscapes, solitary mornings. These images form, in an emphatically lyric mode, a strong sense of literary character in the narrator's voice. Bezner's next work, *Particularities*, is forthcoming this year. *Particularities* is to be a book-length poem. Will the objectivist strain in his poetics translate across forms? The transition seems like a leap. But *Wherever* demonstrates that Bezner is in good command of his craft.

* Virgil. *Aeneid*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. Vintage, 1985.

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Silent Treatment.
Lisa Lewis.
Penguin, 1998.
79 pages. \$14.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Robert West

Silent Treatment is published as part of the prestigious National Poetry Series, and, like most poetry collections from reputable publishers, it boasts enviable jacket praise from a handful of eminences. One looks for poetry to surprise, but this book's surprise – alas – lies in how bad it is. In the vast majority of these poems there is simply nothing interesting happening. Most present a kind of low-calorie psychodrama, without any redeeming sense of linguistic play. Dull poems could at least have the courtesy to be brief, but these are interminable: the very shortest is 32 long lines long, and many go on for several pages. Fifteen out of the 24 poems sprawl over three pages or more, with lines as tedious as these:

Not one man in my whole life has said I'm
Pretty. It's because they have discerning tastes.
My friend says her 300-pound boyfriend
Called her homely. He told her he'd repair
My problem with men. One night with him,

He said, and I'd be over it. She tells another
Story. I have to admit I'm curious.
I guess he thinks I've never been fucked.
I guess that's what he gets for not knowing me

All my life, when I had something to prove.

Or these:

There's
A hummingbird trapped in the indoor arena, I said,
My voice catching so I felt embarrassed. She looked
At me strangely: *Can it get out?* I asked. *Oh, sure.*
She said. The next day I found out. I rode my filly
Slowly beneath the hummingbird's skylight;
And there was its body. It had worn itself out.
Goddamnit, I don't know why that makes me so mad.
Maybe because I didn't try to help.

Really – do you think? I suppose the poet thinks this will be interesting to someone, but it's hard to imagine a literate person being riveted by such stuff. There are a few good poems (The anaphoric "I Knew If I Looked" stands out), and a few weirdly fascinating ones (such as "Sexology"), but on the whole *Silent Treatment* is frustratingly bland.

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The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics.
Rachel Blau DuPlessis & Peter Quartermain, editors.
University of Alabama Press, 1999.
379 pages. \$24.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jeffery Beam

Editors DuPlessis and Quartermain have done a valuable service in collecting these essays which confirm and extend the importance of Objectivist poetics in American poetry. This movement began formally with Louis Zukofsky's "Objectivist" issue of *Poetry* (February 1931) and *An Objectivist Anthology* in 1932. The Objectivist poets, branded by an editorial demand for a common rubric by Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*, became associated with a capricious aesthetic practice and philosophy. The major poets connected with the term, George Oppen, Lorine Niedecker, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting, Charles Reznikoff, and Zukofsky, are the subjects of this book. The editors and essayists see clear origins in the work of Pound, Stein, Moore, and W.C. Williams; and important descendants in Cid Corman, Kathleen Fraser, Lyn Hejinian, Rosmarie Waldrop, and the Language poets.

Debated, refused, embraced, contradicted, defined and redefined by its "members," Objectivism's central tenets has remained relatively stable – the poem as object, as a formal music formed from the intense and sincere gaze and intelligence of the poet. Over time, however, these principles have enlarged into a neces-

sity to “focus many factors into one unit,” “the elucidation of a new object, or an old one stripped so one could see it freshly,” and “of or having to do with a material object as distinguished from a mental concept, idea, or belief.” Each practitioner has refuted or refined these ideas in their writings. Mainly through Lorine Niedecker (who came to the movement after the two original anthologies), and the evolving work of younger writers in the tradition, the need to express interior feelings through the object has become important. I would argue that Stein and Williams, in particular, presaged this evolution.

This collection of essays serves to flesh out the many paradoxes inherent in these oftentimes unlike and cantankerous poets. It elucidates relationships between the cultural milieu and this group of writers whose work frequently engages in social, political, and cultural criticism. It connects the reader to the core aesthetics which enabled for such a destabilizing, avant-garde poetics. DuPlessis and Quartermain suggest the term “nexus” for its un-limiting quality – defining a movement in which the poets’ differences and changing concerns orbit around each other, retaining relationship, but allowing contradiction. This valuable anthology furthers the fine work began in Quartermain’s *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* published in 1992 by Cambridge University Press. *The Objectivist Nexus* is an essential tool to understanding a complicated, lively, and enlightened poetic movement of the last century, which will continue to exercise considerable influence in this one.

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Once in Vermont.
Bob Arnold.
Gnomon Press, 1999.
116 pages. \$13.50 (paperback).

Reviewed by M.A. Roberts

Bob Arnold builds stone walls. He also builds poems that will last for generations and as natural as stones working together. Edwin Muir once remarked that modern poetry is not read by “the people,” because it no longer tells a story. “The people” should reconsider. In fact, I’m going to ask my local hardware store to make this book a permanent fixture at the front counter.

Once in Vermont is the enduring story of Arnold’s life. The book moves from short meditations on family and environment, to longer, more narrative poems about country folk. Arnold then returns to his beginnings with a series of condensed meditations. By the time I finished the book, I felt I had visited with Arnold, his family, and his community.

The shorter poems stun – brisk mornings or radiant dusks, bringing fresh vision to daily events, precisely measured with condensed, turning lines. “Sun Up” opens *Once in Vermont*:

I get up with
The birds who
Get up with me

Delicate repetition. The poem sticks in the ear. Notice how the third line inverts the first. The difference is grammatical and reveals that “doers” (“I”) are also “receivers” (“me”). The poem realizes that no one meets the day alone, that the natural world rises just like the human world. The epiphany comforts, especially those who live close to the cycles of nature, as Arnold does.

I’ve long been a student of line-breakers, asking why poets are compelled to cut one word and not another. At times, I find no method; at others, it’s clear. Arnold falls into the latter. I like the way the end-words of each line achieve a fluid rhythm. Go ahead, say them: with, who, me; with who me. The hardest sound appears first; the owl-ish sound second; the softest, quietest third. With who me. Bird-like, isn’t it?

An overly deliberate poet might have approached this expression more concretely, naming the birds, or describing bare feet on cool floors. But Arnold abstains from details, leaving us our own potent imaginations. Arnold evokes quiet, morning feet on creaking floors; he achieves the auditory mix of dawning songbirds – not with immediate images, but with intimacy of melody and rhythm.

A good chunk of the book is given over to meeting people: “Local [deer] Killers”; Manny, a hard-line country woman suspected of “beating the kids”; Tom Newall, a 90 year old who “boiled 400 gallons / Of maple syrup last year”; the town “Son of a Bitch” who would “bitch at you, bitch at me, / Give him a topic / weather, taxes, / School budget, road maintenance, local / Politics”; and even Arnold and his “Reputation.” These stories describe how people get along and misunderstand each other and, ultimately, how they can’t live without each other. But Arnold is not merely introducing us to the town-folks and their uniqueness. He shows us a vanishing community, a small town turning mid-size, houses every “1,000 feet”, and woods increasingly subject to clear-cutting. This is community dealing with a rapid change.

Arnold’s work is steeped in the speech rhythms that I grew up with in Southern Appalachia. Although Arnold’s characters hail from his home state Vermont, the accent of my grandfathers and neighbors is “pert-near” the same. This rhythmic, speech-oriented language sustains many of the poems in *Once in Vermont*. He doesn’t polish the phrases or clauses; they sound as common as John Smith. A poem called “Neighbor”