

Actually, they already do – and in places you wouldn't expect, like Messiah, a private Christian college near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. People write papers on Dylan for the class. I met the dude who teaches the class. He's a librarian who looks like a gay preacher. But he's a Dylanologist. I wonder what his dissertation's on.

Howard Sounes, who has also published a biography of Charles Bukowski, is, at 35, a major Dylanologist. He researched his book for over three years, conducting countless interviews with people who hadn't spoken about Dylan before, and his exhaustive Source Notes run to 53 single-spaced small-font pages. As a researcher, Sounes is terrific.

However, this book, however major at present, cannot ever become the "definitive" Dylan biography. It will unfortunately serve as reference material. All the manuscripts, the dissertations, the memoirs will appear after Dylan's death, but when it comes to the Doop on Dylan, this is the book, at least for now.

Part of the reason is that Sounes is torn between stereotypical tabloid fare and a "scholarly treatment." The result, while at times a good read, is also sometimes annoying, not the least of which is because Howard refers to his subject as "Bob" throughout, reminding one of those preschool textbooks that referred to the honesty of "Abe," not Lincoln, for example – Howard does this several times a page, as many as 10. Well, since he's known primarily by his surname in the legends of the industry, and though I know the author means "Dylan," one day if the phone rings at 3 A.M. and it's answered by whomever I'm in bed with at the time, and I ask, "What the hell?" and she whispers, "It's Bob," I'm not gonna know who she's TALKING about, as Bob is the name of my father, my landlord, a good friend's brother, my postal carrier – and Dole, DeNiro, Duvall, J.R. Dobbs, and my Rottweiler. I'll leave that at that.

But Howard does indeed create an engaging and competently written account of Dylan the Man, especially his darker sides – this the Life of Bob Dylan, not the "work" or the "art" or the "songs" or the "vision." And his focus in that area is on certain types of relationships Dylan had had with others, but not on Dylan's maturity and growth.

Howard reveals most of all Dylan's sex life. He names names and does interviews. Seems Dylan's fucked quite a lot of women, and has no plans to stop as of the last writing. He had some trouble with the Bottle, too, and Howard's looked into it. Yet he also provides useful information, and makes us glad we're NOT a Gemini from Minnesota, though this effect is not intended.

But the WOMEN, my LANDS, man! And just what an ass Dylan is to them. And I admit I'm more engaged with a book like this than I would be by an analysis of every chord he played related to the pitch of the voice OR a biopsy of his lyrics. And after a while this somehow gets really FUNNY.

Down the Highway nonetheless remains an important and seminal work in both its broader field of cultural studies or its more immediate one, Dylanology. Howard will doubtless address his style and continue to become the next Donald Spoto, and he is a fantastic researcher and a good, clear writer.

Yet I find his book could have been better, and, I'll bet, so did he. His academic agenda is clearly put forth in the book's opening, and Howard holds to it (no, he's a psychoanalytic critic, not a Post-Structuralist). He progressively falls away from the assertive determination of the book's early chapters to focus on all the women Dylan continued to get up until the book went to press, basically. While Dylan the Icon and Archetype and Dylan the Man are clearly defined and separated, Dylan the Man becomes Bob, and we don't like Bob any more than I feel an abundance of affection for my landlord.

But Howard Sounes wins the day on this one. As Dylan himself said on "You Gotta Serve Somebody," you can call him anything you like. And maybe Sounes is also making a point: "The music's out there, right there for you. I'll not speak about what you know, but what you don't."

And flawed as this biography is, flawed as Bob Dylan, as Original Sin and the Human Condition, I come from Howard's book with one, convicted conclusion: I used to think Bob never got any women. But things have changed.

Trying to Catch the Horses.

Dan Gerber.

Michigan State University Press, 1999.

67 pages. \$17.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jeffery Beam

"Something not only of itself / comes out of the tree when I see it, / something not me that I am." ("A Tree on the Prairie in Mid-October") It is unusual to read a poet who is both calming and adventurous at once. Dan Gerber seems a man who has been places – geographically and internally, and who has come out holding a rich conversation with the world: "The wind makes seven different sounds in the sage." ("Storm Warning")

Novelist Jim Harrison, who coedited the literary journal *Sumac* with Gerber from 1968-72, provides the epigraph for one poem and a perfect summation of Gerber's gifts: "It's very difficult to look at the world and into your heart at the same time." Gerber's poems, imbued with a mystical Zen pantheism – a still and clarified center – instruct and console by their unadorned revelations in which the human, represented by Gerber,

cohabit the natural world without dominating it.

Kindness and responsibility guide the poems. Oftentimes moving, always wise, always precise as the prairie dogs, storms, pine trees, and blackbirds he describes, they call up a David Ignatow of the woods, Jiménez, Rilke, and the great Zen poets. Poems of the actual, of the true, they value "the present in which a car with a blown muffler rumbles and a neighbor's dog barks" ("Remembering to Breathe"), understand that "what we don't know / is subscribed by what we do." ("Grouse"), and live where solace confirms "Beyond the meadow is a greater meadow / and beyond the trees, more trees." ("Walking Out Alone") Contrarily, Gerber's poem, "The Favorite Child," holds one of the most harrowing psychological mother portraits in poetry:

*And I will eat this child, and he will satisfy
the hunger in me. Maybe.
And I will eat mine slowly, a little
at a time and make him last
my whole life, and even a little longer
so that I can go on eating
even when I have no stomach.*

* * *

Before It's Light: New Poems.

Lyn Lifshin.

Black Sparrow Press, 1999.

239 pages. \$16.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Mark Hornburg

Lyn Lifshin's new collection opens with a section of autobiographical poems (a section entitled, appropriately enough, "Biography") and finishes with the author's end-page bio. A collection bookended in this way is bound to serve up a generous portion of narcissism. Where this is the case, as in "Cabbages, Leaves and Morphine," Lifshin's poetry feels attenuated and prosaic – the difference between the autobiographical and the merely self-referential. A few poems even dissolve into pop music lyricism, as in "Enough": ("... And those / lies, I don't want / you moving thru my / arms anymore, / everything you / fall against / breaks open"). The worst poems here, which appear in a section entitled "Others" are merely cutesy: Lorena Bobbitt's recollections of the fateful night she held a detached penis in her hand; the Unabomber's girlfriend drawing up a list of complaints ("He was always typing or / whittling . . ."); Jackie O reading *The Story of O*; a feminist Barbie; Jesus in various contemporary modes (smoking pot, watching *Deep Throat*, fucking, going to galleries).

Many of these free verse poems achieve success, however, by fetishizing personal objects (a locket, a wedding ring, an article of clothing, a book, cigarettes),

as in certain Hitchcock films, in which homely objects, once fetishized, achieve powerful symbolic force. Primitive societies fetishized objects they believed to hold magical powers; 60 years after the death of Freud, Lifshin acknowledges, these talismanic objects obtain an erotic force, the "magic" of human sexuality. Lifshin often extends this fetishism to aspects of physiognomy, particularly hair – an especially sensual feature of the human body. Lifshin seems most comfortable operating in this mode, but other poems here – in a collection whose subject matter is all over the map – are also affecting, particularly those that read as pages torn from a memory book, as when the poet tackles the death of her mother. This series of poems begins with "The Doctor Says My Mother Is Fun," in which Lifshin's mother first learns that she has cancer:

... The doctor talks in
a soothing voice, doesn't answer,
as my mother, unlike what she
earlier begged not to know, now
says, "of course, I must know

exactly what tests show," and I
feel faint as the doctor talks of bad
cells spreading, closing off her
throat and then something in
the lung. My mother is bubbly,
laughs. The doctor says, "Your

mother is fun" and my mother jokes
as she will back in her room, grin
"I'm fine," to people who will leave
her alone to let what is sink in.

* * *

Blizzard of One.

Mark Strand.

Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

55 pages. \$15.00 (paperback).

The Weather of Words: Poetic Invention.

Mark Strand.

Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

142 pages. \$22.00 (hardback).

Reviewed by Robert West

Blizzard of One, former poet laureate Mark Strand's ninth collection, is a mixed bag. In some ways it's surprisingly slight. With only 20 poems, it's much shorter than its immediate predecessors, *The Continuous Life* (1990) and *Dark Harbor* (1993); the book design is attractive, but it's also clearly intended to add page length. On top of this, several poems are simply fluff: "The Beach Hotel," "Old Man Leaves Party," and "I Will