

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