

underlined a revealing, quotable line: "we live our past like a disease. / We move in an eternal stumble" ("Hippocrene"); "we lie in arbors of our making" ("Arbor"); "We have gone crazy with belief" ("Myself as a House"); "Light slices the sky, you are less and less / able to stifle a cry for someone to save you." ("Cascades: the Arrival").

One stylistic aspect that runs throughout Saltman's work is his use of personification. From his earliest to his latest work, inanimate objects defy stasis, take on human desires. "Myself as a House" is a good example, as we are given the surreal equation: the house and man are one. In Saltman's world, the house "breath[s] rich fumes," has a "wife and three children," and inspects itself for the "termites' cursives" who "build the house in reverse." Other personifications abound in this volume: "food will set out for mouths"; the "city slips onto sand"; "smoke questions"; the "sun" sews; "guilt crawls on all fours"; cut trees "finger" themselves; knives "dream"; maple trees "ring bells." Such striking images create a sense of one being dug-in, sealed into position – the middle-class life? I think so. In a late poem, "The Committee," Saltman writes "Flowers, crisp and / dead though the petals remained, / lined the driveway / and said that what was allotted / to middle-class life / would be revealed to me." Several stanzas later the secret unfolds as he ponders the items of his home: "It was clear that what I had had me." He is bound, dug-in, but not stifled. I imagine Saltman in a swivel chair constantly observing and writing about the middle-class world that is so blunt and apparent but ironically invisible to those who live it.

On the back cover of *The Sun Takes Us Away*, W.S. Merwin says that Saltman's poems possess a "lovely plainness." I cannot agree more with his estimation. Saltman's style is clean like Sunday-dinner glasses that have been carefully washed and dried. He's also direct, unhindered by any pretentiousness. The voice is humble; even when he criticizes American culture (as in "The Purchase," a poem that attacks the American drive to consume), I sense that he is chastising himself as much as he is the average citizen.

While *The Sun Takes Us Away* represents Saltman's work over the past 30 years, his newest publication, *Sleep and Death the Dream*, gives us the poet's final work, written while Saltman knew he was dying. This thin volume is powerful. Perhaps I am being propelled into emotion because I know that a real man lived, got a disease, wrote these poems and died. But I don't think that the story behind the book is all that is at work here. These poems are good because they move me and make my sympathies resonate.

In this work, the human is celebrated. Consider "All the Parts," where Saltman brings to the fore the mangled human yet calls it beautiful, calls it complete:

The man with a dent in his head,
the woman with half a jaw,
these are more complete than flowers
with all their petals.

This fine book is full of these rare, surprising lines.

The poems in *The Sun Takes Us Away* and *Sleep and Death the Dream* are clear, bold, and humane. More importantly they express what it means to be human. And that's a grand accomplishment. Near the end of the book, Saltman writes "Every one who leaves intensifies what's here." Evidence to that truth is in Saltman's poems, which, I am certain, will deepen and intensify with every reading and the persistence of time.

Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan.

Howard Sounes.

Grove Press, 2001.

527 pages. \$27.50 (hardback).

Reviewed by Kevin McGowin

May 24 of this year marks Bob Dylan's 60th birthday, and all of a sudden he's never been bigger or more important, at least since sometime in the 60s. A man who's been around for 40 years is current again, still touring and producing work that's among the best of his career, and seemingly in with a generation who, like Howard Sounes, is in its mid-thirties. It all began with 1997's Grammy-winning classic *Time Out of Mind*, his first album of new material in seven years, and continued through the release of Columbia's retrospective *The Essential Bob Dylan*, so far as I know the only CD (other than a Swedish import, which is actually a better collection) to include "Things Have Changed," the song that's really re-launched Dylan's career. In March alone, he won an Oscar for it (it had also won a Golden Globe) for Best Original Song in a Film (the excellent *Wonder Boys*) which landed *The Essential Bob Dylan* in the top 10, and saw Sounes' book hit the stores along with major articles in both *Vanity Fair* and *Rolling Stone* (the "Dylanology" article).

I admit to buying at least one copy of everything I just mentioned, and then some, which along with this review and the fact that "Things Have Changed" was in large part the inspiration for my novel *The Benny Poda Years* (before he won anything for it and before I'd seen *Wonder Boys*), I guess I now qualify as a Dylanologist myself. That, and the fact that I'm "teaching" his work to 19-year-old college students. Contemporary American poetry sucks, with very few exceptions, but Dylan will be remembered as one of the greatest post-War American poets. As the *Rolling Stone* article asserts, it won't be long before colleges offer courses on him.

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.

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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,