

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”

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

* * *

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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