

READ & RECOMMENDED

Jeffery Beam

The Book, Spiritual Instrument.

Jerome Rothenberg & David Guss, editors.
 Granary Books, 1996.
 160 pages. \$21.95 (paperback).

A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing.

Jerome Rothenberg & Steven Clay, editors.
 Granary Books, 2000.
 537 pages. \$28.95 (paperback).

When Will the Book Be Done?

Steven Clay, editor.
 Granary Books, 2001.
 208 pages. \$40.00 (paperback).

Jerome Rothenberg's always original and thought-provoking work within language and poetics has established ethnopoetics as a discipline encouraging expanded definitions of cultural artifacts. In these two books, he and his co-editors explore the meaning of "the book," envisioning a primal book written "out there" from which all manifestations of language spring. Proposing a book as a metaphor for imagining opens its interpretation to something more than a vessel for words; it becomes a communal theater of experience and instrument for action, facilitating invention and belief, communication and ritual, revealing itself as a spiritual conduit for human becoming. In *The Book*, essays on theater, the *Torah*, the Mayan *Popul Vuh*, and tribal sounds, intersect with interviews, photographs, and works by writers such as Edmond Jabès, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Eluard, performance artist Alison Knowles, and book artist Karl Young.

This intersection between visual, oral, and published language constitutes the basis for a vividly entertaining and instructive exploration of literature, aesthetics, and books as philosophical, notational, and revelatory instruments which cannot be replaced by other modes, even newer high tech ones. Dick Higgins states "The book is, then, a container of provocation. We open it and are provoked to match our horizons with those implicated by the text."

A Book of the Book extends and amplifies *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*. Here Stephen Clay, publisher of Granary Books, joins Rothenberg, segues his experience as bookmaker into Rothenberg's language explorations. Subtitled "Some Works & Projections about the Book

& Writing" it succeeds in manifesting materially the spiritual pattern imagined in the previous work. It also evaluates positively the value and necessity of maintaining actual books in the new continuum redefined by virtual ones.

A Book of the Book amply offers essays on literary notation in various cultures, printing as an art, Modernist and Post-Modernist literary movements, the book as religious object, Emily Dickinson, Blake, Mallarmé, Art Brut, shaman Maria Sabina, tribal songs and visual poems, Chinese calligraphy and other Asian aesthetic principles, bookmaker Adolf Wolfi, Jewish mysticism, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and even novelty books (including children's pop-up books). Alongside appear generous excerpts from writers and visual and book artists such as Anne Waldman, Gertrude Stein, Edmund Jabès, Max Ernst, Keith Smith, Antonin Artaud, Whitman, Blake, Tom Phillips, Jess Collins, and others. A special treat is a gatefold of a poem by Blaise Cendrars illustrated by Sonia Delaunay.

Charles Bernstein concludes his essay which closes the volume thusly: "Poetry's social function in our time is to bring language ear to ear with its temporality, physicality, dynamism: its evanescence, not its fixed character; its fluidity, not its authority; its structures, not its storage capacity; its concreteness and particularity, not its abstract logicity and clarity."

Bernstein brilliantly summarizes Clay and Rothenberg's intent. Well organized, wide-ranging across time and space, *A Book of the Book* is an engaging read for anyone interested in the aesthetic, literary, historical, technical, and anthropological development and meaning of the book. It would make a fine textbook for a class on book arts or the evolution of the book. Scholarly, yet accessible, it is an important contribution to our appreciation of the importance of books. Working on many levels it provides a profound mediation on the book as living thing, growing out and into us.

When Will the Book Be Done? celebrates fifteen years of publishing by Steven Clay's Granary Books and serves as a delightful accompaniment to the two previous works. Featuring complete lists and descriptions of nearly 100 artist's books, writer / artist collaborations, and books of theory pertaining to books, writing, and publishing, it illustrates Clay's devotion to the book as object, and as the repository of poetic language and revelation. Handsomely printed (as are the previous works), with generous color reproductions from Granary's publica-

tions, the viewer discovers a museum in a book, and finds one's appetite to touch the works therein whetted, but not sated. Steven Clay's books are destined to be some of the most cherished works of the last part of the 20th century and the first part of the 21st.

While publishing books of great literary, social, and aesthetic value, Clay also convinces of the necessity of the book centrality as a cultural artifact. These three works from an essential library for anyone interested in the book arts.

To Do As Adam Did: Selected Poems.

Ronald Johnson.

Talisman House, 2000.

151 pages. \$16.95 (paperback).

Johnson, who died in 1998, has yet to be acknowledged as the great 20th century American visionary poet that he was. Johnson's architectural, visual, and aural poems explode on the page — fireworks moving easily from meditation to ecstasy. Grounded in scientific precision, the poems are dolphin-like, intense, sleek, beautiful, experimental — yet accessible. They contain some of the most unashamedly gorgeous language in poetry: "What we wanted // was both words and worlds / you could put your foot through."

Poetry like this deserves to be read aloud as the subtleties of his music ring more clearly when nursed by the voice. Johnson's work is one of exploration and unknown lands — the mind's land enraptured by the shape of things, the earth's landscape becoming the mind's residence. Grounded early on in a hybrid 18th century post-modernist style which soothed as the gorgeous prose of English writer/artists such as Samuel Palmer soothes, and surprises as the Concrete and Objectivists poets surprised, Johnson's work evolved into an ecstatic otherness which is hard to describe — abstract, metaphysical, scientific, futuristic, and, yes, pastoral.

This volume contains poems from some of my all time favorite volumes of poetry by anyone, Johnson's *Valley of the Many-Colored Grasses*, *The Book of the Green Man*, and *RAD IOS* (a poem "found" in the text of Milton's *Paradise Lost*). As the essentially pastoral vision of his poems transformed into a cosmic one (as Blake and Palmer moved from pasture to constellated sky), Johnson built a space ship out of words and cre-

ated *ARK* — a work which expanded into a celestial riff in the mode of Rodia's Watts Towers in Los Angeles or James Hamilton's "Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly" (which can be seen at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in D.C.). The beauty, the weirdness, the spinning lightness and vortex-aural dizziness of *ARK* is unsurpassed anywhere in poetry — particularly in America. "I find I advance with / sidereal motions / — my eyes containing substance // of the sun, / my ears built of beaks and feathers — // I ascend with saps." ("Emanations") *ARK* is the culmination of work begun by Blake, continued by Dickinson and Whitman, hinted at by Sitwell, and demanded by our dark time.

Cloud Writing.

Ricky Garni.

Micro-Ding Production, 1998.

16 pages. No price (paperback).

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Ricky Garni.

101 Secret Wing Ding, 1998.

46 pages. No price (paperback).

Wardrobe: A Tale at Home.

Ricky Garni.

101 Secret Wing Dings of Change and Summer, 1999.

66 pages. No price (paperback).

El Hombre de la Capacastellana.

Ricky Garni.

Ricky Garni, 1999.

30 pages. No price (paperback).

I know the poets Russell Edson and Alfred Starr Hamilton would love to meet Ricky Garni, for they are as quirky, and separate, and as original, as he. The three make the triumvirate of American poetry of the parenthetical thought, and only Edson has had the luck of gaining some attention from it. (Check out Russell Edson's newest too: *The Tormented Mirror*) Hamilton may be dead now for all I know. He would be 86 this year, I think, living hand-to-mouth in Montclair, NJ, with the Muse. (Be sure to read Jonathan Williams's essay on Hamilton in *Blackbird Dust*, a book reviewed