

Preservation Trust International. This ending recasts much of the previous sections; amidst relationships forming and dissolving and the calls of the animals are woven references to the building of houses and the cutting of forest. Selch's poem works the global into the personal and suggests there is no more mythic, poetic past with "a boundless forest / for the words to warble through."

Poems like Selch's "The Field-Biologist's Girlfriend" suggest paths for fruitful new directions. The expansiveness of this poem hints at possible new growths and directions, an almost boundless abundance. In contrast, Clarke's solipsistic poems seem almost formal narrow alleys, possible dead ends in themselves and for others. But for now, both of these collections provide immediate pleasures in look and language.

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*Boss Cupid.*

Thom Gunn.

Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000.

111 pages. \$22 (hardcover).

*Granny Scarecrow.*

Anne Stevenson.

Bloodaxe Books, 2000.

80 pages. No price (paperback).

*Reviewed by Kevin Bezner*

Thom Gunn and Anne Stevenson offer readers two different examples of how British and American English can merge into distinct and unusual poetic language.

Gunn was born in England in the 1920s, but since the 1950s he has made the United States, in particular San Francisco, his home. Primarily a formalist, Gunn's latest book, *Boss Cupid*, consists of poems that, said simply, are rough (his American side) and refined (his British side). The outcome is a poetry that is somewhat of a cross between Eliot and Williams, or a poetry with hints of Byron and Auden tempered by Williams.

Gunn can be wickedly funny, as in "Cat Island": "Sensible bourgeois / wild-cats / Working / with the furred impudence / of those who don't pretend / to be other than whores . . ." Or he can just be wicked, as in "Troubadour," a series of songs for Jeffrey Dahmer, where he uses a traditional form that so sharply contrasts with his content that the form itself becomes ironic: "That sullen moody summer when it rained each day / I sat in my room, sat in the kennel of my inaction, / With few abilities, my parents away / Getting divorced, I think, gnawed my dissatisfaction."

Stevenson was born in England of American parents, grew up in the U.S., but has made England her home. In *Granny Scarecrow*, her use of language is just as precise,

and just as wicked, as Gunn's. But unlike Gunn, she is more Eliotic than she is like Williams, and her writing has somewhat of the flavor of Plath, who owes much to Eliot, and Levertov, who owes much to Williams. Here are the four short lines of "Old Wife's Tale": "Well, then, goodbye,' she said coldly, / 'hot men must mate.' // But the energy of injury, oh, it hurts like hate." And here she is in "Whistler's Gentleman by the Sea": "He knew himself as Sunday in a hat, / Patrolling borders of a century that / Lectured the waves and watched them shuffling back." Stevenson can also turn her wit against herself, as in the bright, concluding poem, "Postscriptum": "Now I am dead, / no words, / just a wine / of my choosing. // Drink to my / mute consent, / my rite of dissolving."

Today, we generally think of American and British poetry as approaching language in two separate ways, with the differences between the two best defined by Eliot and Williams. But with Gunn and Stevenson, we encounter a poetry that resolves these differences by using elements of each of the traditions they have rightfully called their own.

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*Nature: Poems Old and New.*

May Swenson.

Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

240 pages. \$15.00 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Kevin Bezner*

The last line of May Swenson's poem "The Exchange" which appears at the end of the short opening section of *Nature: Poems Old and New* is this supplication: "Water, invite me to your bed." This humble and quiet but beautifully crafted line serves as a perfect summary of how Swenson views what the editors of this book have chosen to call nature. Throughout this collection of poems by an unusually gifted writer who is now largely overlooked, we are offered the precise thoughts of a poet who not only observed the non-human world around her, but inhabited it. There probably isn't a poet who has ever lived who hasn't written somehow about nature. But few ever live in and with the land and the other creatures, the universe beyond what has been created by human beings. Swenson is one of these few.

Although understandable, it is unfortunate that this collection is called *Nature* and that its cover illustration is Filippo Lauri's "Apollo and Daphne," which is based on the story of how Daphne rejected Apollo's love, sought her father's help, and was transformed into a laurel tree Apollo then chose as his own. Together, these choices might mislead readers to assume that Swenson is yet another contemporary Romantic, but one who has