

The Danger in Everything is an outstanding effort for a first full-length collection. While there are the occasional inconsistencies expected from a young and passionate poet, there is every reason to expect Jeff Walt to make a significant contribution to the poetry of our time.



Buried Land.

Jim Clark.

Eternal Delight Productions, 2003.

\$15.99 (compact disc).

Reviewed by Cy Dillon

Jim Clark has a well-deserved regional reputation as a poet, essayist, and teacher. *Buried Land* proves that his abilities as a musician are also remarkable, but beyond that, the beautifully produced compact disc is an ambitious attempt to connect the poet's use of language, image, and meter with a deep and nearly lost tradition. Clark is a competent reader of his spare and beautifully crafted poems, and his interpretation of traditional music in the Old Time style is even better. In "Dark Hollow" and "Sweet Sunny South," for instance, he maintains the dignity of the original tempo of Old Time as well as anyone I have heard, and after over two decades as a volunteer at the Blue Ridge Institute I have heard many. These two songs and the booklet of poem texts neatly stowed in the package are the best features of this effort. On the other hand, "Barbara Allen" and one or two other songs suffer from just a bit too much emphasis on the English ballad sound. There he almost crosses the line into sentimental nostalgia, but even then Clark's versatility and mastery as a musician come through clearly as he plays everything from harmonica to dulcimer.

Of course, nostalgia is the beast that must be battled whenever Southern writers—and musicians—address heritage. Clark wins this battle in the music, in the photographs on the cover, and especially in the poems. He is neither an innocent nor a Nashville wannabe. As he says in "Return":

I have been gone a long time
but not far
even so there are changes
and I am beginning to understand
the ways of pilgrims
and what is written
in light
behind their eyes.



Piece Logic.

Erica Hunt.

Carolina Wren Press, 2003.

26 pages, \$14.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Dr. Keith B. Mitchell

In her recent collection of poems, *Piece Logic*, African American poet/activist Erica Hunt continues to explore issues of poverty, exploitation, environmental degradation and its link to the vicissitudes of American capitalism. Hunt's title and subject clearly point in two important directions: through her poetry Hunt exposes piecemeal political and social agendas in the United States that the majority of American citizens have been convinced are logical. In addition, her collection of poems offers an oppositional poetics that attempts to illustrate the logic of peace that is sorely missing from contemporary America's socio-political landscape.

The first poem, "A House of Broken Things," echoes Abraham Lincoln's words, "A house divided cannot stand." Hunt's poem elaborates further by pronouncing that not only is the (American) house divided, but it is also broken. The poem's speaker laments that we live in a country whose "logic" in selecting who deserves to pursue and to obtain the American Dream and who does not is fatally flawed, noting that in America, "a foreigner is welcome as long as s/he is generic. Or naturally naturalized and numbered." In short, to be an American today one needs to be assembly-line generic like the mass-produced consumer goods the United States effectuates. "House" speaks to our government's discriminatory immigration policies in which race, ethnicity, and nationality determine who is allowed within America's borders and who is not. A case in point is the policies regarding the West Indies. When seeking political asylum in America, Haitian immigrants, "coping in an open boat. Skirting the remote," are usually repatriated while (light-skinned) Cubans are generally welcomed into the country.

"Object Authority" expands upon tropes found in "A House of Broken Things." The speaker critiques American capitalism that "promises to ban objects offensive to good sense. Promises by the row what no money can buy, belonging." Even history has been commoditized and made generic: "History [is] not only written by the victors but revised and trade-marked by them and their revision happily bought up by the re-conquered as regurgitated shrink wrapped kente clothe toaster ovens, adhesive backed ikat on temperature control waffle irons." As long as money is to be made, America shamelessly mass-produces cultural artifacts as readily as it does other

products.

"Household Gods" speaks to the inherent fetishization of objects in a consumer society. This poem describes a female factory worker who, "disassemble[s] and reconstruct[s]," small appliances on an assembly line. However, when she looks at these same items on display in store windows, she barely recognizes her handy work, "in their bright packaging and suggestively cut cardboard . . . They seemed coy, the way the naked body when clothed or partially clothed is coy . . . She is momentarily baffled and aroused by the come-ons of appliances in the market place, shudders in the shameless steel." Producer and consumer have become one and the same—libidinally seduced by the very products s/he produces.

Piece Logic's closing poem "(Parabola)" critiques Enlightenment thought and scientific absolutism that was constructed, "to test the order of things." The poem is an apocalyptic piece and describes how through humankind's unending quest towards perfection (godhood?) through science, we have lost, "the ability to see through masks, the ability to walk on shifting ground the ability to read between the lines." In other words, like a parabola, so-called logic has come to the same exacting point. All things have become logic-centered, leaving little room for the intuitive, the imaginative: "Parable met parable and devoured it." Those stories which sustained us, "our shared prehistoric past," for the purpose of "illustrat[ing] the unknown," have caused "the page [to lie] absolutely still."

Hunt ends "(Parabola)" and *Piece Logic* on a skeptical yet hopeful note by recalling what we might regain from the recesses of the past and a redefinition or resistance to today's often illogical logic: the ability to see beyond and behind what is presented to us as reality, which might, if we are brave enough, give us, "[a] courage to face what lies around the bend in the road."



Threshold.

Shirley Kaufman.

Copper Canyon Press, 2003.

142 pages, \$12 (paperback).

Reviewed by Reginald Harris

Shirley Kaufman's work is an attempt to restore the reader's senses, to bring back our ability to take pleasure in small things. Closely observed and keenly felt, her latest book, *Threshold*, is filled with the finely-honed details of life. Kaufman's work as a translator, mainly of poems originally in Hebrew, has helped sharpen her eye for lan-

guage and how it works. She sums up part of her poetic process in "Little love poem" this way:

I collect these words
like coins
in the bowls of beggars

they add up to
just enough to
keep going

Originally from the United States, Kaufman has lived in Israel for the past thirty years. The poems in *Threshold* also range from Seattle to Jerusalem in its subjects and concerns, from the "projective verse" style poems of its opening movement to later sections dealing with family and long-term love, Biblical figures (Adam, Rachel, Jacob) and the poet's role as historian and witness. While there is a love of life and the things of this world in her work, there is always sadness, a haunted sense lurking behind Kaufman's poetry. Even a New Year's celebration at the millennium causes her to reflect:

the twenty-first century
nothing
but sparks and flashes
collapsed
into dust

too many zeros
ending with smoke

Quietly political, Kaufman's work does not take sides in the conflicts in Israel or anywhere—"good guys / bad / what's the difference / if everyone fights" she writes—her work comes down very strongly in support of humanity, and the lives of those caught up in the meshes of violence. Resonant and deeply satisfying, *Threshold* is a solid, serious and ultimately moving work by a consummate and compassionate professional.

