

derwear she appears to be removing slowly. The image summons forth poems of eroticism, adultery, submission, and sensual pleasure. But to label Scott as mere love poet undermines her versatile poetic oeuvre.

While *The Penny Bride's* poems are usually topical and often sexual, "The Olives in the Vats" diverges from both; here Scott meditates on her craft and "poems that go unwritten":

They come up from the streets and gutters
on the butt ends, spit, and rat
flotsam of our failed sailings,
envoys of the future sent to warn us to turn back.

But turn back the poet rarely does. Her first-person speakers celebrate sensuality, often in apostrophe to an absent lover—"Your love is food enough for me. / I don't need to dine on more." Scott is clever and mischievous, as when she imagines herself as a pinball machine played masterfully by a lover, and when she equates lovemaking with the writing process in "On the Desk." And when she juxtaposes the mystical and sexual in "Nazarenes," she poses the carnal as a spiritual wonder born of night.

Despite Scott's indulgent submissions to love, *The Penny Bride*—as the title suggests—is not without sadness. When her neighbor draws her "mother's laughter like / water from deep in a well," she brings reader and dead mother close. Her gift is the ability to write emotionally and artistically accessible poems as she moves through sex, masturbation, middle age, pregnancy, anorexia, deceased parents, and memory loss, amongst other topics.

Any potential disappointment in *The Penny Bride* would likely stem from its length. Sixty-eight poems is a handful too many, especially when the simplistic rhyming couplets of "Ink" and "The Girl of His Dreams" and the kitsch of poems like "The Magic Poetry Book" detract from what is a delightful book.



Sea Gate.

Jocelyn Emerson.

Alice James Books, 2002.

72 pages, \$12.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by David Need

Jocelyn Emerson's wonderful collection of poems *Sea Gate* gives evidence of the continued value of serious poetic inquiries into issues normally left to philosophical diction. Taking sea, shore, and river, but also mourning as her proximate subjects and primary metaphors, Emerson explores the relations of self and world that surface

and haunt expressive gesture.

This is poetry capable of concise grace:

As slightly as the routes of stars
oak leaves fell on the lake
as part of the rain's work.

More often though Emerson's sentences are long, full of parenthesis or ellipsis, with a driving rhythm reminiscent of Derrida's early prose.

It is also a poetry inflected by both the spoken tempers and plain thing-words of American poetry and the abstract music of late-twentieth-century continental critical thought, a poetry that modulates between the language of migration and weather, and the abstract vectors of sign, iteration, desire, and erasure.

Like Rilke, Emerson goes deep into the double-bind that marks being and language. And like Rilke, she finds an ecstatic transport finally in which double-bind reveals itself as "voluminous ellipsis," a full openness where, subsiding, she can fill the simple and minute with passion:

Listen to the scale of the varied day,
shaken singer, to the charred song
of the particle and of the mineral ash
still and elemental in the whistling dark.

And still share in mourning:

In a manifest world broken by rough claim, flesh—
earth's share—is scored by all those no longer living now.

Find this book, be touched and amazed.



Claire: Poems.

Marly Youmans.

Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

52 pages, \$15.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Tara Powell

Marly Youmans' first poetry collection, *Claire*, is a graceful debut blending romanticism and a formal temper to describe a woman's coming of age. Dreams, tales, doors, night skies, ice, births, and deaths, all follow Claire Ann, the "lepidopteran" character whose "songs" unite the collection. Through centuries and seasons, readers glimpse facets of Claire's elusive "ancient single self, / Toy queen of glass who broke to babel all / These casts of mind?"

The book's finest selections crystallize that self for fleeting moments. The jazzy "Piano Rag" captures a

childhood romp under “curls of leaf / And dusty light,” whereas the blank verse of “The Locomotive Song” records “hear[ing] the tremulous sound flower / and widen in moonshine” as the night train passes. The adult poems layer that innocence with loss. Despite the merry rhythm of “At the Glass Doors,” the “blazing” autumn moon has gone to “milkglass in the trees.” In the somber couplets of “Living in a Dead Friend’s House,” Claire grows from fearing ghosts to longing to “see a face at panes.”

Claire is an unresolved tale in images, and some of its loveliest poems fragment the book’s scheme. Among others, “Ellen Cameron White,” a haunting free verse narrative about the death of a woman’s fiancé, and “Arrowhead,” energetic couplets comparing a man’s farm to the sea, thrum with significance that never breaks the collection’s surface.

Nonetheless, there is much to admire in *Claire*—strong versification, sharp and interesting images, and a feminine voice whose negotiation of being human will invite readers to return to her songs again and again.



Early From the Dance.

David Payne.

Plume Books, 2003.

400 pages, \$14 (paperback).

Reviewed by Karen Trimbath

Fiction writers can have a hard time letting go of their stories after they are published; this reluctance to move on seems perfectly natural, for writers spend hours immersed in shaping an amorphous draft into something more elegant. Once they’ve reexamined the bound copy, though, their inner critics resurface. Given the chance, many writers seek perfection, no matter how elusive. In some instances, they come close to it. John Fowles was so bothered by the flaws (and there were many) of his 1965 version of *The Magus* that he went on to revise this tale of a surreal mind game played on a Greek island. His revisions resulted in a more masterful version twelve years later.

North Carolina native David Payne is another such author. Payne ended up revising his evocative novel of friendship and betrayal, *Early from the Dance*, which was originally published in 1989. In his preface to the Plume edition, he notes that he wanted to revisit this story to remove “paste [gems] and to leave as many pearls as possible.” By “paste,” he means excessive words and redundancies that prevented readers from fully entering his fictional world. A good rule of thumb for writers is that

revisions are called for when the mechanics are noticed more than the performance.

Payne’s work has certainly paid off, for *Early from the Dance* is a compelling read about Adam Jenrette, a self-described “prodigal son returned,” and the sassy Jane McCrae. Its pacing, taut language, and intensity are all marks of a storyteller fascinated by the mysteries of the human heart. He also conveys a strong sense of place through his details of rural and coastal North Carolina. Indeed, during a recent trip through this state, I imagined Payne’s characters living somewhere beyond the veil of Southern pines lining the highway. A good novel like this one can seem so real that it shapes how we view the world.

The story follows the conventions of traditional Southern literature (you know, wise black servants, family secrets, alcoholic parents, and colorful personalities with draws to match). For the most part, Payne is comfortable working within these conventions, which isn’t to say that this book is boring by any means. Perhaps working within this genre has allowed Payne the freedom to relax and create a richer narrative within a familiar framework.

Adam, thirty-one, is a well-known artist in New York City. He’s on a downward spiral fueled by too much cocaine and a cynical attitude. One day he gets a phone call and learns that his Aunt Zoe has died. She and other family members own Dixie Bags (a play on Dixie Cups, perhaps), which employs many people in Adam’s rural hometown of Killdeer, North Carolina. Aunt Zoe, a kind, strong woman, had bequeathed to Adam her mansion, which is badly in need of restoration.

So after some soul searching, he flies home for her funeral, during which we’re introduced to characters who once played important roles in his life. There’s Uncle Max, who once bopped Adam’s father on the head for writing a thinly fictionalized account about a family scandal. There’s Sadie Kinlaw, whose son Cary had been Adam’s best friend growing up (he committed suicide as a young man). And there’s Jane, Cary’s former girlfriend and recent divorcée. All of them are there to pay their last respects, and their presence elicits strong memories and emotions in Adam.

Sparks fly from the moment Adam and Jane get reacquainted at a cocktail dance. It’s been fourteen years since they’ve last seen each other. Payne switches effectively between their points of view throughout this novel. Adam’s is that of a transplanted Northerner who wants to forget his roots, whereas with Jane’s exudes pure Southern belle. Her realistic, school-of-hard-knocks attitude provides an effective counterbalance to Adam’s dreaminess; it’s clear that she’s come to terms with the past and wishes Adam would too. No wonder the chem-