

istry between these two still remains strong.

Both of them describe how they met and what's happened to them as adults. We learn of the deep friendship that developed between Adam and Cary years ago. As opposites, they had complemented each other; Adam was the privileged rebel and Cary was the earnest good ol' boy. Then Jane entered the picture. She was beautiful, spirited, and, above all, ambivalent about her feelings for Cary. A love triangle inevitably formed during the summer after their high school graduation. The secret romance between Adam and Jane, once discovered, had destroyed the equilibrium of an old friendship and, it's suggested, Cary's will to live. It was this betrayal that drove Cary to kill himself, Adam believes.

Clearly, Adam's perceived betrayal of his friend and its tragic consequences still color the way he views himself, his love for Jane, and, most of all, where he came from. He can't move on without confronting this tragedy. Letting go involves rediscovering the place that he once called home and investigating the event that pushed him away. So he revisits the parts of town where he'd spent time with Cary, the ones that have remained frozen in his head like stations of the cross. A midnight visit to Cary's place in the woods shows the unexpected effects of time and neglect. "The whole scene was like a visit to a museum—a personal one, dedicated to my youth," he says.

The narrative's first third provides delicious romance and a comforting, if somewhat predictable, suspense. Then comes part two, "The Lost Colony." Here is where the story begins to transcend its genre. Told entirely from Adam's point of view, it's a bewitching account about the power of seduction. We go back in time to that fated summer when Adam and Jane fall in love. Adam recounts how he began working as a lifeguard near the Lost Colony, an elegant seaside resort. Soon he meets owners Cleanth Faison, a charismatic father figure, and Morgan Deal, a former lover who can't bring herself to leave.

Cleanth's power over Adam and Jane is substantial and involves a game that he calls "Life Poker." It's a game that Adam finds irresistible. "I felt myself slipping irrevocably into his unknown world, not unwillingly, though not so much because I wanted to or liked him either, but because the throttle was pressed down there," he recalls.

Strong parallels exist between this section, *The Magus* and, by extension, *The Tempest*, because all are about a hero who enters a mythical place ruled by a magical Prospero figure and his beautiful daughter. The Lost Colony—named after the settlement that vanished soon after its establishment in 1587 on Roanoke Island—is an American version of the island, a private space in which anything can happen.

I won't go into more detail, but suffice it to say that I

found this section quite gripping. Adam's and Jane's motivations are believable, and so are the events that draw them together.

The time comes when the young man must leave this island, usually for the wiser. Sometimes he wins his Miranda, sometimes not. Payne, to his great credit, makes us care about Adam's fate.



Sedition and Alchemy: A Biography of John Cale.

Tim Mitchell.

Peter Owen Publishers, 2003.

238 pages, \$29.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Douglas Russell

As one of the founding members of The Velvet Underground, a successful record producer, and a consistently daring solo artist, John Cale is a musician deserving of real attention. His VU counterpart, Lou Reed, has been the subject of several biographies, so it seems only fair that Cale finally receive the paper treatment.

Cale's is a life not easily distilled, but that isn't the only challenge facing his biographer. First, there's the trouble of maintaining interest in a subject who, though undeniably important to the history of rock, lacks the pop cachet of eminently bio-friendly figures like Kurt Cobain, Elvis—even Lou Reed. And in this case, there was that extra pressure on every biographer who knows his subject might never see another treatment.

Tim Mitchell does a fine job mapping the circuitous route Cale traveled from classical musician to rocker. Aaron Copland, Iannis Xenakis, and La Monte Young all played a personal role in his musical development, and Mitchell skillfully traces how that training influenced Cale's subsequent work. Cale is a musician who travels freely between the high and low, across a normally closed border guarded by the worst kind of culture police. This is the meat of Cale's story, and Mitchell keeps his teeth in it.

But despite its fascinating subject, *Sedition and Alchemy* has a difficult time sustaining the energy necessary to keep readers engaged. The biography presents a wealth of detail about Cale's life, but his personality somehow gets lost in the mix. It's a shame given the seeming ease in which Mitchell profiles the eccentric members of Cale's motley posse (Warhol, Reed, Nico, Eno). Cynics might be quick to identify here the potential for self-censorship whenever biography is produced "in full cooperation" with the subject.

No doubt possessed by free-associative spirit of Sur-

realists and inspired by the indeterminacy of John Cage (both significant influences on Cale), Mitchell punctuates the text with random facts, figures, and quotes. For instance, immediately before Mitchell describes Cale's engagement to his first wife, the fashion designer Betsy Johnson, the following appears in bold: "On March 9, 1902 Gustav Mahler married Alma Schindler." Other asides resonate even more faintly. A sentence in bold type about Pablo Cabral sailing with his fleet to India in 1500 had at least this reader scratching his head. Some might applaud Mitchell for his willingness to stretch the biographical form. Other readers will find that instead of providing real insight into Cale's life, Mitchell's post-modern, intertextual detours too often read like the circumstantial products of a Google search.

Every music bio should inspire the reader to pull out old records and re-examine them. This one had me reaching for *Academy in Peril* and *Sabotage/Live*. And even with its significant flaws, *Sedition and Alchemy: A Biography of John Cale* happens to be the only comprehensive resource on this gifted and influential artist available. Hardly a ringing endorsement, but it should be enough for die-hard Cale fans, and those of us who insist on dancing about architecture.



Coromandel.

Thomas Meyer.

Skanky Possum, 2003.

64 pages, \$5 (paperback).

Reviewed by David Need

Poetry is arguably the most precarious of arts because its media is the ephemera of language, in which both communion and alienation surface, often at the same time. For the poet, this leads at times to suspicion of what is dearest to her and to years of silence. All this is doubled in modernity, where we are taught to be alienated from our desire.

Thomas Meyer's five-part long-poem *Coromandel* approaches these issues along the Projectivist lines laid out by Charles Olson and others. This is a poetry designed to interfere with a reader's strategies of reading so as to disrupt the stranglehold of convention, that seeks to answer the totalizing grip of culture by opening up silent spaces of possibility.

Meyer would probably be satisfied then that I jotted down notes such as, "I am being thrown out of this text," and "this is poetry that is against itself." And since this is a long poem, the minimalist effect is relentless, even

though the each word or line, taken alone, has the soft touch of the lyric.

I have to admit that I take modernity from Rilke rather than Elliot and the American tradition. I prefer silences that are full rather than torn off and spare. I have always thought that Elliot was never sufficiently critical of the American tropes of individuality and freedom and that this led him to prefer a renunciatory, privative landscape.

If a title is any clue, Meyer's choice of *Coromandel* is perhaps an indication of the same. With echoes of "cormorant" (an American waterfowl), the term is an Anglicized form of the name of a coastal region of Southeast India, that was then used more widely to refer to Southeast Asian coastal regions and their hotels, and to a lacquer made in the region. Meyer's poem contains the bricolage of the colonial—an odd clutter of classical myth, the occult (where the tarot and astrology briefly surface), and American landscapes that surface both as vista and in the names of flowers. But *Coromandel* suggests that the relations among these might be subordinated to a private, isolated ambered coast in which such difference sublimates.

As an image of a possible ground of being, the twin images of amber and the coastal serve Meyer well. Reading the text one has the sense that its memories and images are caught in a smoother surface that leaves them frozen. But the echoes of the coastal remind us that even these apparently disconnected globules of image belong to a place that is in between, swept back-and-forth by tides, a landscape that is constantly being displaced, undercut, reformed.

The poem's sequence echoes these motifs, and the center of its displacement is its third section entitled "Quincunx." Here, after a long opening movement phrased in shifting couplets and a second, seventeen-page, single-stanza poem that drops, line by line, like a stone, Meyer shifts to a series of quatrains whose relation to one and other is disjunctive and unsettled.

This structure reiterates what is said in both the sheets of amber imagery that characterize the first long sections and the coastal imagery, by which Meyer suggests the further possible. "Unlock the door," Meyer tells us midway through, and, at the end, he surfaces to say,

Hemlock hard to tear limbs off. Perfumed hands.
Come live here.
My lips bark. Gray dawn moves. Changes the hills.
Walks into my heart.
Make a bird of it. Dog at the door. Who's there.
The years from now.

This is sweet enough, but the whole is more formal, a spell meant to strangify the lyric so as to better deploy a resis-