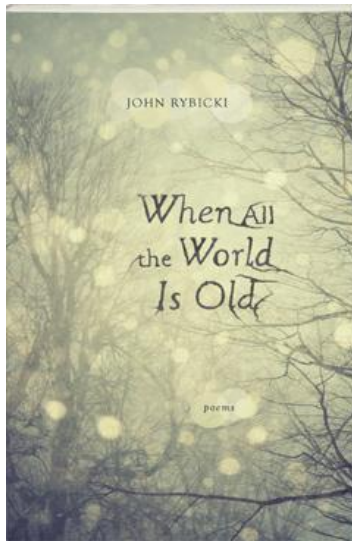


EXEMPLARS IN APRIL

Monthly Book Reviews by Grace Cavalieri

April is National Poetry Month but in *The Washington Independent Review*, every month is poetry month. So these are the April “Exemplars” chosen to celebrate this month. We take a look at poets John Rybicki, a century of Italian poets; and three postscripts—new books from Boa Editions: Ira Sadoff, Ryan Teitman, and Jacek Gutorow



When All the World Is Old by John Rybicki extols the life he knew with his wife before she succumbed to cancer, and then, his dissonant world without her. There is no norm in poetry as there is no norm in grief and it’s a good thing because this book cannot be measured against any other. There are 99 pages of poems where John Rybicki sings as if he’s in a lyrical palace and other times, screams, cries, intones and rocks with language. Death is the reason all writers write (Wallace Stevens: “Death is the Mother of beauty”) but some writers treat it as if it’s a personal secret. If John Rybicki’s words cannot pierce the film of eternity chasing after his lost love, then there is no sound allowed there at all. He blesses the world with lilt and language – eloquent and kooky—and I dare anyone to read this and not feel a new acquaintanceship with grief. From the opening poem, **One Body**, this: “This is her last night out in the world. /The gray sky’s tossing down its crumbs//and it’s getting dark. “You’re so good to me.”/ she says, gazing across this bridge of light / we make everytime we look at each other./The light is thread-like, but you can trust it,//you can hold on to it. “You’re crazy,” I say. /”What, you want me to smash this ice-

cream cone// against my forehead to prove it?" And I do. /We crush our way through what is left// and kiss each other's fingers. My Dame and I, /we linger for hours like this, //cracking our pens together like swords. / one body, really, like you dream about."

It's a brave undertaking to open the heart on the page and see what falls out, and then fashion it into some sort of an agreement with the reader. **Why Everything Is A Poem:** "I sing to keep the embers in the night sky alive—/ those sparks God tows out of my love's chest/ each night. I sing from the crown of her stubbed head/ to the arch of her foot where I'd kiss and kiss her/till she said, Dude, rub in the love like you do..." and then, "I sing her dripping just out of the bathtub, / her fingers squeaking against the steam/ on the bathroom window where's she scrawling/ her last love note to my own son and me. She's singing/ the words over and over as she writes, *I love my boys...*" and the final words of the poem..."She leaves a heart and words that reappear/ when we place our mouths close to the glass./ My son and I fog it with our breath/ after she is gone."

Sometimes Rybicki chooses words that tell the facts, and other times he finds details that reveal the possibilities of Julie's nature. He knows poetry is an unfinished business and so is the poem. He can enrich the line with the tiniest detail that can only belong to him. From **On A Piece of Paper You were About To Burn ...**" Soon she'll peel off her shirt for bedtime/shivering even before you drive the needle into her arm. / You miss the bird's nest made of hair on your dresser, the kissing her baby-bald head/ when you were young and in love with as much/ blood as rain pouring out of your shoes." Of course the power comes from moving back and forth across time in the line, and these are the unconscious choices the poet makes. It's what Percy Bysshe Shelley called "imagining what we know," where the real event is subjugated to a magical one so that the truth is not flat. The tiny perplexities present *a picture* of the facts rather than the facts themselves. This turns into the kind of truth that permeates the consciousness. From **A Mother Is A Living Blossom ...**"Mother, wrap my father in a blanket/ of your own freckles. / Father, pick the roses carefully/ from my mother's eyes. Remember: / you placed a typhoon on her finger."

John Rybicki, who teaches poetry to children in hospice and other alternative places, speaks about his "preacher arms in some ghetto school/ trying to drag a marching drummer/ out of each student's chest..." He is like an evangelist traveling holy ground shouting his boisterous love in all the dark forgotten neighborhoods. And he is also gentle. In the book's last poem **I'm Only Sleeping:** "... Let go

now, Johnnie./The moon is writing// sweeter sentences on the water/ than you anyway./ Pull the earth over you now and sleep.” And a small poem in its entirety:

One Wish

If love could grant one wish

it would be this: I would bloom

and take Julie inside me, keep her

safe, leave one lantern rocking

in the night sky over her head,

where God’s heart should be.



The FSG Book of Twentieth Century Poetry is an anthology edited by Geoffrey Brock. I decided to read through the poems before the introduction to test the primary colors of what I read. This book is a momentous occasion and I can’t recall another Italian anthology of its scope. Dennis Barone has recently edited a fine book, *New Hungers for Old: One-Hundred Years of Italian-American Poetry* (Star Cloud Press) that comes in a close second. With Brock’s *FSG book*, 75 poets are translated into English

including some of our greatest poets, and some others you'll be glad to meet. I began by reading the "younger" poets first to see how closely they match the fabric of contemporary American poetry. Among the most recent poets are those born in 1957: Gabriele Frasca, Fabio Pusterla, Valerio Magrelli; and in 1955, Antonella Anedda; then Patrizia Valduga (1953). These are contemporary poets and the tone of their poems is dramatically different from American poets in the same age bracket. There is a clear adherence to traditional verse and traditional subjects. We get unapologetic lyricism and classical verities. Of course one writer is not like the other in the sampling; but generally we just do not find the strange results in Italian modern day thought as on the American page, and the knife thrust through fantasy that Americans love so much. Antonio Porta (1935-1989) uses his gift of depression well, with remembered feelings and new poetic forms. I also like the untamable Edoardo Sanguineti (1930-2010) writing "*From Erotopaegnia*" "*From "Hell's Purgatory,"*" "*From "Libretto."*" I like the way Franco Loi (1930) achieves an apparent indifference to beauty as he writes, and Ravaello Baldini (1924-2005) brings us directly into his daily world. Among the greats is Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912). His moving work sees more good in the world than perhaps existed in his time. F. T. Marinetti (1876-1944) is de-rigueur for the era and his "Manifesto of Futurism" is essential in understanding the Modernist movement in Italy. The intellectuals with their secret lives have managed over time to change Italy and the world beyond. The roots of this are also seen in the poetry graphics of Corrado Govoni (1884-1965) and the prose poems of Dino Campana (1885-1932.)

Geoffrey Brock's contribution as editor is incalculable. He speaks of the triads (Carducci, Pascoli, D'Annunzio) and (Saba, Ungaretti, Montale). His introduction is for the connoisseur and lover of Italia. It's an opportunity to understand the flow of poetry disrupted by time and politics. This experience allows us to enter into the skill and pleasure of great minds across the distance and fullness of history. We can see how Italian poetry moves through illusion and expectations. This book closes the space between all "passengers of poetry" as if we could speak together. Some 145 distinguished American and European poets serve as translators, including Pulitzer Prize winners and Poets Laureate. This is not a book you read. This is a book you live with through the years.

Annalisa Cima (1941) is represented with two poems translated by Marianne Moore, and one translated by Jonathan Galassi.

To Him

Convince me of your love

come to me to loosen

this not of anguish

Only you can.

this not of anguish

Only you can you dense with gull's wings.

Look

we are high on the branch

in the morning sun.

And we're leaving pearls on the road,

sweet drops

of illusion.

(trans: J.G.)

Postscripts: Three New Books from Boa Editions



Postscript #1: *True Faith* by Ira Sadoff, Boa Editions, 88pgs.

The best kind of social critic is the poet. Sadoff's new book is an arsenal of wit and strong sensations. Poets by nature are contrarians and so these poems find their way with a strong narrative. Sadoff doesn't try to save the world –he's more interested in describing it with a charged line and emotional climax. The book is a voice of energy within beautifully designed stanzas. Sadoff writes as if he invented the 21st century but now he's not quite sure what we should do with it. *True Faith* shows loving faith in a flawed world, with poems leavened alternately by resignation, irony and surprise.

Postscript #2: *Litany for the City* by Ryan Teitman, Boa Editions, 80 pgs.

The cities in Teitman's imagination are not of mortar and stone. They are holograms of places, colors, people and possibilities. The book is in three sections: The final section **Metropolitan Suite** features prose poems that are really poems, not strung prose. The winner of the A. Poulin first book prize gives us a lot to look forward to. Teitman's line of sight and insight document the marvelous, and the world is

made better by his view. He captures the various temperaments of place in a dream of the present. The foreword by Jane Hirshfield delights the book and sets a tone of clarity and vision.

Postscript #3 *The Folding Star* by Jacek Gutorow, Translated by Piotr Florczyk. Boa Editions. 84 pgs.

As translator Piotr Florczyk points out, "Polish poetry enjoys a singular status in the United States." I would go further and say America has a love affair with Polish poets, especially Milosz, Szymborska, Herbert and Zagajewski. Now we have a new talent on the scene. Jacek Gutorow combines the philosophical nature of his elders with the positive values of the imagistic. Gutorow is a lyrical poet who ponders the edges of what cannot be known. At the same time he describes the outer world as if it were personified for human purposes. Here is a poet of observation who submits to serve the poem without bending and manipulating the line. He writes of the inevitable with a tenderness that says that there are fewer threats to our lives if we will just listen and see.

Grace Cavalieri is a poet and playwright. She celebrates 35 years on-air this year with "The Poet and the Poem," from the Library of Congress via NPR distribution.