Paula Koneazny reviews
Alice Notley
**IN THE PINES**
Penguin Poets

“Alice Notley is a fierce and fearless writer.”

Gary Lain reviews
Mel Freilicher
**THE UNMAKING OF AMERICANS: 7 LIVES**
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“Freilicher finally believes that despite all of its cruel and arbitrary social barriers, love abides.”

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**THE LIGHT SANG AS IT LEFT YOUR EYES: OUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY**
Marsh Hawk Press

“The Light Sang documents a restlessness, an ardent quest for a means of pure saying.”

George Held reviews
Halvard Johnson
**ORGAN HARVEST WITH ENTRANCE OF CLONES**
Hamilton Stone Editions

“Johnson’s affinity for the compositional freedom advocated by Jack Spicer and John Cage can be easily seen in these poems.”

Rob Schlegel reviews
Joanna Klink
**CIRCADIAN**
Penguin

“Klink deliberately complicates the boundaries between the speaker’s interior landscape and the physical landscape.”

Kara Mason reviews
Pamela Thompson
**EVERY PAST THING**
Unbridled Books

“Every Past Thing is a meditative novel.”

Dave Stevens reviews
Michael Horovitz
**A NEW WASTE LAND: TIMESHIP EARTH AT NILLENNIUM**
New Departures

“A New Waste Land shows Horovitz for the first time at epic scale.”

LineOnLine announces reviews featured exclusively on ABR’s website.
The title of Alice Notley’s latest book, *In the Pines*, is revealing. It designates the site of burial; *the Pines*, the place where all the dead loved ones lie. Instead of narrating events dependent upon volition or desire, the poems included here embody the active stasis of the *verb to be*. In her choice of the preposition in instead of into, Notley grants her poetry location rather than trajectory. The pine needle, fragrant and sharp, is “that old pine needle,” the needle of infection that infuses the long poem “In the Pines.”

On the other hand, pine trees also evoke “Momma, in the pines,” “the tree of shammars,” and “the tree of life.” This dance of contradictions, however, is but a surface feature of a world in which the poet sings, “to be this negative is an action with no known flower yet, but I prize it.”

Alice Notley is a fierce and fearless writer. When she asks herself, “How am I changing the writing,” I am reminded of Benjamin Hollander’s imperative that writers must break with tradition, which Notley suggests is 10,000 years (dating from the Agricultural Revolution?) of selling the murder of human beings by other human beings as well as “ten thousand years. Of this imposed feminalness.” With this interpretation in mind, her repudiation of story-telling that caters to a voyeuristic interest in death and disease can be seen as just as much an ethical choice as her persistent refusal to make peace with patriarchy. In *the Pines* is divided into three sections, arranged in order of decreasing density or increasing compression: “In the Pines,” “The Black Trailor,” and “Hemostatic.” The meat of the book is largely contained in “In the Pines” and the eponymous first poem of “The Black Trailor.” If “In the Pines” were a movie instead of a poem, I couldn’t bear to watch it, because I find it so disturbing. This lengthy poem, or series of poems, is discursive: it takes up both philosophical and physical matters. On page one, Notley baldly states that she is infected with Hepatitis C from an injection of amphetamines thirty-three years ago. She describes her infection as her defect, the defect from which she now writes. She exposes and explores the irony of the infection that kills and the one that cures, and the deeper irony that love engenders death. To what extent, however, does this speaker accept her infection as her identity? She asks herself, “How far gone / into my defect am I,” while claiming that the infected are the precursors. She proposes a new species, one that issues from a different kind of evolution than that theorized by Science.

In *the Pines*, whereas Science and Religion seem to be the poet’s adversaries. Her accusations reverberate like curses: “There wasn’t a reason for the world, I say. It didn’t last, because we forced our reasons onto it.” She rejects the supernatural, although for her “natural” is not defined by science and can’t be decoded or broken into by scientific theories:

> All of my anguish was physical. I had no soul.

Alice Notley is a fierce and fearless writer.

The title of the opening poem in the second section of the book, “The Black Trailor (A Noir Fiction),” unsettles with its made-up word *trailor*. This intriguing elision of *trail* and *or* prompts me to read the title as “The Black Trail or a Noir Fiction.”

Exactly who is trailing whom remains ambiguous, as this poem could be described as a monologue acting like a dialogue. There is a speaker as well as a “you” who is spoken to, spoken about, and spoken for, but who does not speak. The appellation *noir* is appropriate here because there is a corpse, a dead body onstage:

> Move it,
> you say, move the whole corpse of earth away.
> Move the whole planet somewhere?
> You say that you’re dead and it’s dead: can’t it be pushed back through a hole in timelessness?

Both Science and Religion seem to be the poet’s adversaries. Her accusations reverberate like curses: “There wasn’t a reason for the world, I say. It didn’t last, because we forced our reasons onto it.” She rejects the supernatural, although for her “natural” is not defined by science and can’t be decoded or broken into by scientific theories:

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**In the Pines**

Alice Notley

Penguin Poets

http://www.penguin.com

131 pages; paper, $18.00

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_Say What Must Be Said_ by Paula Konezny reads, writes, and works in Sebastopol, California. Her poetry has appeared most recently in “The War Issue” of Volt and is forthcoming in Pool and Aufgabe. Her reviews have appeared in ABR, Verse, and Rain Taxi.
The Unmaking of Americans: 7 Lives, by Mel Freilicher, portrays seven tragically exemplary Americans in three sections sorted by both implicit and explicit similarities, Freilicher investigates and presents the biographies of troubled "divas" Bettye Page, Dorothy Dandridge, and Joey Stefano; proto-feminists Margaret Fuller and Margaret Sanger; and the talented, complex and committed black Americans Billy Strayhorn and Bayard Rustin, both of whom were openly gay during a time when "they didn’t even have legal rights." To provide a loose thematic emotional continuity for The Unmaking of Americans, and to bring these very diverse figures into the context of our own recent times, Freilicher introduces the character Peripatetic Book Reviewer, an itinerant scholar and college lecturer, and an amusingly everyday picnic, Peripatetic Book Reviewer discusses the seven "American" women in which our "7 Americans" were marginalized by the official culture because of their varying sexual and gender orientations/preferences/attitudes with his own autobiography in very personal, immediate, and moving ways.

Book 1 of The Unmaking of Americans relates the fate of Bettye Page, Joey Stefano, Dorothy Dandridge, and Bayard Rustin. The focus of a recent, trendy cult following, Page is here portrayed (through the vehicle of her rather dubious, we are told, biography) as a fairly complex figure: a sexually adventurous young woman and uninhibited bondage photo model, who later in life becomes a dangerous and abusive moral fanatic. Page is also drawn as knowing and funny, yet cautious of the implications of her work, and the social sanctions that could befoul her industry at any time. Stefano is viewed here as celebrity, as gay porn dreamboat, and we gain little access to his psychology or motivations. He is a vital and potent figure, and one is heartened by his lack of inhibition, but he was also a hopeless drug addict who could not allow for sexual liberation (in fact, it’s all of its cruel and arbitrary social structures that was ultimately a pedestrian misunderstanding.

There is somewhat more to say about the classy and accomplished Dorothy Dandridge (who, one might argue, is placed in rather rough company here with Page and Stefano). Polished, talented, and beautiful, Dandridge was a groundbreaking black actress, landing leading roles in major Hollywood films (Carmen Jones [1959], Porgy and Bess [1959]). Later, Dandridge (taking bad advice from her mentor/lover Otto Preminger) declined a role in Carmen Jones because of the implications of her work, and the social sanctions that could befoul her industry at any time. Stefano is viewed here as celebrity, as gay porn dreamboat, and we gain little access to his psychology or motivations. He is a vital and potent figure, and one is heartened by his lack of inhibition, but he was also a hopeless drug addict who could not allow for sexual liberation (in fact, it’s not even clear that she considered sexual practice as other front within the same struggle), as she, "advocated celibacy until a woman became strong enough to choose freely whether or not to marry." Fuller apparently took her own counsel: "Accepting the notion that it was impossible for her to be fulfilled as both a woman and a thinker, Margaret voluntarily denied her own intrinsic value. "Such dens have their price, of course, and as the engaging and independent Fuller grew older, she became, "melancholic, priggish, subject to violent tantrums." Fuller’s emotional isolation here underscores Freilicher’s overarching theme: we are damaged in the most intimate ways by the structures of our social institutions. Fuller eventually did take a lover (a reserved but not unkind or insensitive young Italian aristocrat, Giovanni Ossoli), and they had a child, Nino. After a few fulfilling though exhausting years in an Italy undergoing revolutionary social changes (with Fuller working as the director of a hospital), Fuller and her family booked passage on a merchant ship bound for America. However, the voyage was ill-fated, ending tragically: "The Elizabeth came in sight of Fire Island, when it ran aground...a mountainous wave broke over the vessel...Nino’s body appeared on the beach a few minutes later; Margaret’s and Ossoli’s were never found."

Margaret Sanger led a rather different life. Born in the late nineteenth century, she “managed to have it all,” including many lovers who largely simultaneously with two marriages. In Margaret Sanger’s uniquely brilliant, fifty-year career, she developed a network of independent birth control clinics and engineered a major movement: transforming women’s rights and access to birth control services worldwide. "I think it’s important to note that Sanger is the only figure here who does not suffer the effects of the profoundly internalized emotional isolation that "unmakes" the lives of Freilicher’s other Americans. She serves as a sort of counter-example of how, given an opening during a less-restrictive cultural milieu (particularly bohemian Greenwich Village during the early twentieth century), a non-conformist like Sanger might live happily.

Sanger’s biography also allows Freilicher to pursue the theme of agency, which he fruitfully continues to develop in book 3, which explores the lives of two gay men: black American civil rights activist and organizer Bayard Rustin and the socially conscious jazz composer Billy Strayhorn. Activism also is part of Peripatetic Book Reviewer’s life, as we learn in these sections of his own participation in anti-war and civil-rights protests. An obviously heartfelt and frankly moving passage concerns the funeral of Peripatetic Book Reviewer’s friend and colleague Anne, a black American academic and writer who overcame substantial social and institutional impediments in the course of her career. He deals equally well with the death of his friend Kathy Acker, effectively detailing the cataloging of her papers and the discovery of her last manuscripts; a rather remarkable, lustily descriptive dream sequence involving Acker heightens the sense of her presence and loss for Peripatetic Book Reviewer, and for us.

Here it becomes clearer as to how Peripatetic Book Reviewer functions thematically in this text: Peripatetic Book Reviewer implies that it might be useful to see, in the ways they are marginalized by the social institutions of their eras (and the ways in which they resist, or accommodate, or internalize, or succumb to this marginalization), a certain continuity and thereby an implied solidarity between these seven Americans of such widely diverging backgrounds, and between ourselves, no matter our identifications. Freilicher ends by quoting Billy Strayhorn’s song "Lush Life": "I’ll live a lush life in some small dive / And there I’ll be while I rot with the rest / Of those whose lives are lonely, too." The immensely talented, innovative, and prolific composer Strayhorn, we learn, essentially drank himself to death, dying of cancer of the esophagus at fifty-one. Freilicher sees Strayhorn’s "Lush Life" as an anthem for, “Billy’s generation of gay people, as well as for those who came after, especially those who refused to be dispossessed: despite the crushing loneliness, fighting against what they fully recognized as monstrous obstacles, yearning for love." One senses here, between the lines, that Mel Freilicher’s final book offers the deeply human and equal challenges of the cruel and arbitrary social barriers, love abides.
Who is the author of The Light Sang As It Left Your Eyes? Is it Eileen R. Tabios, prolific Filipino-born poet, editor, blogger, Barnard graduate, Cali-
formia resident, and daughter of Filamore B. Tabios, Sr.? Or is it Eileen R. Tabios, the author-function (as Michel Foucault would have it), the “discursive set” revealed to the reader through cross-hatched trajectories of history, culture, ethnicity, gender, and the borrowed vocabulary of other writers similarly constraining the potential voice of the one whose name that father might have approved—the Eileen R. Tabios who is neither person nor socio-linguistic nexus, but the instrument of a “synthetic and magical power” that achieves its presence in the unique, transcendent moment of the poem itself?

To answer “all of the above” would be equivo-
cal, but not wrong, since The Light Sang engages the nature of authorship from multiple flanks. In his essay “From Work to Text,” Roland Barthes asserted that “the Text is always paradoxical,” so we might be prepared to find that Tabios has assembled here an omnibus of paradox and exploration, at once textual and visual; private meditation and public discourse; self-conscious to the precipice of solipsism yet inclusively polyphonic, postmodern in concept but Romantic in spirit. It is less a book of poetry than a complex: a virtual, almost accidental honeycomb where disparate forces converge and thrive without necessarily coalescing into a stable structure. In her poem “‘Find’ Is A Verb,” Tabios writes: “To collage is to include the world,” and because that line is enclosed in quotes, we can’t be certain of its provenance. In a blog entry reprinted at the end of the book, Tabios proposes “a poetics of welcome” through which she literally assimilates and reframes the work of writers such as Ernesto Priego, Rebeka Lai, Nick Carbo, and Cody McCafferty, and presents outright collaborations with Carbo, Stella Lai, and others.

Unlike her 2002 Marsh Hawk collection, Reproductions of the Empty Flagpole, a formally consistent series of rich, deeply focused prose poems, this book is clearly intended as collage, an assem-
blage of forms and voices signaled by the subtitle’s plural possessive pronoun as well as its cover’s al-
lienation of the names of the two most obvious progenitors: the one that caused tension between me and my father. But it adds up to something more than pastiche. With its mash-up of styles and genres—hay(na)ku, scumbles, diary entries, prose poems, memoirs, blog posts, questionnaires, translations, cantos, drawings, visual poems composed with animal stickers—The Light Sang documents a restlessness, an ardent quest for a means of pure saying.

As a blogger (what, in pre-Internet days, used to be called a diarist, albeit sans audience), Tabios fashions public personae (e.g. “Chatelaine”) to conduct “poetry/conceptual/performance projects,” some of which revolve around personal events. The centerpiece of the book is “April in Los Angeles,” a blog journal recounting her father’s fatal illness in 120 entries of various lengths. They range from the flatly narrative:

Return home to St. Helena this morn-
ing. As soon as we walked into the house, the phone rang. My brother confirmed that all medical treatment has been suspended for Dad and he’s now just on pain medica-
tion and other treatments to make him as comfortable as possible. The focus next is to find the best hospice care facility for him.

to the strikingly candid:

I have trouble remembering anything that caused tension between me and my father. But it all began when I ceased be-
ing a child. When I started to become a woman. When I began to reveal myself as a sexual being.

to the meta-narrative:

What is this that I am writing? Is this a poem? If so, then these words form “lines”?

If lines, definitely written by my body on my body. Lines like those cut by the troubled on their skin in order to divert away from the real pain.

The theme of the father’s death—certainly among the oldest in literature—continues in the sequence “The After-Death History of My Father,” a series of poems and prose pieces that detail, in language both literal and figurative, the self-analysis that follow loss. Casting herself as the Prodigal Daughter, Tabios documents conflicting feelings and memories as they converge in random succession, and notes the protean nature of mourning, the way its focus changes: “The mourning becomes not just over Dad’s death, but how disconnections become realities.” And later: “The mourning becomes not just over Dad’s death, but regret over shut doors, over aborted intimacies of sharings.”

True, there is little that one would find remark-
able—or even original—in some of these passages, particularly in a time when the popularity and ubiqui-
ty of published memoirs and inspirational books on illness and loss outsell most fiction. What distin-
guishes Tabios’s work is the anxiety of contradiction at its core, its concern with formal experimentation, and the depth of its self-awareness. Nowhere is this more obvious than at the very center of the book, where we find, in a piece titled “The Blank Page of Death,” a photograph of Mr. Tabios himself lying in a coffin, a copy of one of his daughter’s books displayed above his chest. The poet writes:

What is it about the image of someone in a coffin? While taking photos of my father in his coffin, I felt appalled—like I was intruding or that the image should be something left uncaptured so that it resides only in memory. Still, I kept pho-
tographing…”

No doubt many readers will be appalled as well, prompting questions of taste that rarely surface in discussions of literature anymore. When does art trespass on human dignity? Should the poetic ego acknowledge any limits? Where does the daughter-
self end and the poet-self begin? What on earth was this woman thinking? But Tabios, rigorously candid and determined to represent all dimensions of the
experience, anticipates these reactions: “I kept think-
ing to myself, half laughing and half…appalled, ‘You sick puppy—what are you doing?’”

Where Barthes and company propose the death of the author, Tabios oversights the death and transub-
stantiation of the subject, proceeding from literal Dad to figurative father, from person to memory, from memory to acute state of self-consciousness, and finally to the performance of that self-consciousness, its unresolved, ongoing conflicts notwithstanding. She enacts this process of catharsis in what almost

feels like real time, so it’s possible to forget that the dreamer is all the while not only witnessing the dream, but directing it.

The Light Sung As It Left Your Eyes strives to be many things at once, and—with much of its contents
having been vetted on the Internet before appearing in print—it creates its own place in the moment as postmodern discourses and digital technologies sweep poetry into new media and expose the art not only to instantaneous, collaborative theories, but to immediate critical analyses and theory formation.

In the midst of this literary maelstrom, Tabios seems eager to reinvigorate and extend questions of author-
ship as they apply to contemporary poetic praxis.

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cently appeared in Boston Review, Electronic Poetry
Review, and Stone Canoe. He is the bibliographer for
English-language literature and film at the Cornell
University Library.

George Held

HALWARD JOHNSON'S poems reflect his encounters
with surrealism, music, language poetry, travel, and
politics, among other realms. Dick Allen has praised
previous work for “the complete interest [he] brings
to so many things,” and that also applies to his new
poems. Johnson’s four earliest books, published be-
tween 1969 and 1979, are out of print but archived at
http://capa.conncoll.edu. After a hiatus until 2003,
he began to produce a series of e-books at a Finnish
Entrance of Clones now makes available eighty-
one of his recent poems in a handsome paperback
edition.

The title poem gives a hint of Johnson’s atten-
tion to words, for it begins, “Every autumn in those
parts, harvesters would / bring in from the fields
wagonloads of eyes and hearts” and other organs
to be used to make clones of their donors. He often
adverts to the peculiarities of current language us-
age, here helping us to recognize the weirdness of
“harvesting” an organ for transplant, as though hu-
man beings were grown like a crop to produce usable
“parts,” a word that reverberates in the quoted lines
above, though with a different meaning. At the end of
the poem, as the speaker greets the clones arriving on
barrows and rafts, he sees them as “establishing a kind
of preliminary / entente cordiale among our sundry
species.” “Entente cordiale,” which comes from
nineteenth-century diplomat language and means a
friendly agreement between two or more nations,
is a word probably found in school books Johnson,
born in 1936, read in the 40s and 50s. He also uses
tags like “Come back, Shane,” from the Alan Ladd
Western; “Pretty to think so,” from the ending of
Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises (1926); and,
in several permutations, T.S. Eliot’s image of “a patient etherized upon a table.”

In this regard, he brings to mind his contempo-
rary the playwright Richard Foreman, whose stage
work also employs verbal tags to present an idio-
syncratic melding of mid-century and more recent
experience. Johnson’s career exemplifies the relative
obscenity of the underground poet, while Foreman’s
Ontological-Hysteric Theater has grown a substantial
collection of preeminent avant-gardists in other media, like Foreman, Cage,

readers, as in the line “St. Bebop romped among the
indebted corbels” (“Tocatta Giocosa”). Even know-
ning that a corbel is a weight-bearing piece of stone
or wood jutting out of a wall won’t make this statement more coherent or less delicious.

Johnson, who writes free verse, in irregular stanzas, and, sometimes, prose poems, is influenced by the
work of Jack Spicer, quoting on his website Spicer’s Second Letter (from “Adorno’s Omissions”) to Redroi Blaser: “The trick naturally is what Duncan learned years ago and tried to teach us—not to search for the perfect
poem but to let your way of writ-
ing of the moment go along its own
paths, explore and retreat but never be fully realized (confined) within the boundaries of one poem.” The other
“required reading” on Johnson’s website is John
Cage’s Indeterminacy.

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Johnson’s affinity for the compositional freedom advocated by Spicer and Cage can be easily
seen in his sequence poems, such as “Frequent
Flyer,” which comprises ten numbered stanzas of
various shapes, lengths, and levels of diction. From the opening description of “a teenager’s party dress
back in the 50s”—“seemingly derived from livestock
and nylon stockings / swooping up and down like
a roller coaster”—through “biomorphic slivers and
blobs,” “videos of men / impersonating women in
Beijing,” the first-person fragment “so I became
a eunuch / afraid to show us nothing,” and various
other seemingly discrete subjects, Johnson plays with
juxtapositions, ending in

mazes of alleys and buildings
nowhere to get to

failed

tried and failed
to go mad

let me have
one final look at you

Whether this kind of discontinuous narrative evokes delight or puzzlement might depend on the reader’s
experience of, say, Jackson Mac Low’s poetry. But
it illustrates Johnson’s sense, expressed in his arch
poetica, “Barn, Slope, Tree,” of “the uncertainty of
our narratives,” “narrative itself / emerging from our
hesitations and contemplations, / always beginning,
ever arriving,” a condition applicable to fellow
avant-gardists in other media, like Foreman, Cage,

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Notre Dame Review, among other periodicals. His
tenth poetry collection is The Art of Writing and

ORGAN HARVEST WITH
ENTRANCE OF CLONES
Halvard Johnson
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113 pages; paper, $15.00

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To some extent, all fiction demands psycho-analysis. Whether asking us to wonder if it’s mere love that results in Anna Karenina’s neurasthenia or to look closely at the way Holden Caulfield idolizes his younger sister, stories pique an emotionally interpretative response. What forces the characters we read about to act one way or another, and in turn, what do our answers to this question tell us about ourselves? John Fulton, author of The Animal Girl, is well acquainted with the life of the mind, but not in the usual sense of the phrase. His characters think and feel, sure, but the states of mind depicted in these stories always deftly translate themselves into action.

Perhaps that is just fiction at its best—“show, don’t tell” and its didactic cousins—but what makes the stories in The Animal Girl unique is that they both show and tell. The line between psychology and literature here is nearly nonexistent. Characters interact with the world, with their family members and loved ones, purely based on past experience and anxieties about the future. A psychologist might read these stories and say, “Ah, yes, this all makes perfect sense.” The lay reader, conversely, will probably think, “Oh, how sad,” even if that judgment is accompanied by the cold tag of knowing that of course it would work out this way.

Which is not to say that everything ends badly or that there isn’t love present. Rather, it’s that things end realistically, but often without the cushion of hope. And the love is everywhere, but it’s fleeting, racked with jealousy and fear and general human dysfunction. Fulton takes a subtly different view of relationships from many contemporary fiction writers today: for his characters, it’s not love that will shine through the prevailing moments of boredom or sadness, but instead the always-unfulfilled desire for love. A dying woman in “Hunters” wants one last lover, but the relationship doesn’t even carry for comfort from her father and not one of these emotional plotlines feels resolved by the end.

What makes these stories exceptional is the revelation that normal people are in fact not normal at all. The story’s depiction of Franklin as a victim of his daughter’s antagonistic unhappiness, the fact is that he is just smarter and more in control; and his cruelty matches Leah’s.

While Fulton has mastered the narrative of his main characters’ thoughts, desires, and foibles, he sometimes falls short on defining the roles of the supporting actors. The reader is presented with types: the annoyingly perfect would-be stepmom who moves in with “her fancy olive oils, fancy French and Italian cheeses” and “her bright, souped-up mountain bike” and “a small waist and noticeable boobs”; the disappointing mother-in-law who listens “too carefully to Evelyn, nodding at her every word, and seeming to watch her so closely”; the protective son who implausibly accuses his father’s girlfriend: “I guess you found out just how much you could push him around. I’d say you’re an expert at that.”

Such descriptions unfortunately fold some of the stories here into two dimensions, with characters appearing in shorthand where they should be fully formed. Similarly, the dialogue these characters engage in rings false, sounding as if it came out of a self-help book or empowerment magazine. The woman in “A Small Matter,” for example, says this during a fight with her husband: “When I married you, I thought I would at least be safe. I thought you were a safe man. I thought you guaranteed me at least that much.” It’s not shocking that she would think this, or even express it in some way, but to dismantle her reasons for marrying with such sterile language seems almost psychotic, which she is not.

Other conversations throughout The Animal Girl fall flat in a similar way. Where Fulton has a talent for explaining complex thoughts, he sometimes fails in letting the thinkers express those thoughts. This imbalance appears most glaringly in the last story in the collection, where Evelyn and Russell share several scenes of stilted dialogue even though Fulton manages to express the motivations and facts of their relationship beautifully. They take walks, cook dinner, fight, and make love, and at times we wonder if we’re reading a sitcom script. But then Fulton defines and dooms their relationship—“He’d continue to irritate her and she’d continue to provoke him”—and in one perspicacious sentence snaps us back to the lovely fiction of The Animal Girl.

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THE ANIMAL GIRL
John Fulton

Louisiana State University Press
http://www.lsu.edu/luspress
174 pages; cloth, $16.95

THE ANIMAL GIRL

Lise Clavel

VIOLENT VIOLETS

CIRCADIAN
Joanna Klink

Penguin
http://www.penguin.com
67 pages; paper, $16.00

The Irish-born novelist Iris Murdoch wrote that the direction of attention is constantly outward, away from the self, which has a tendency to reduce all things to a false unity. What is required then is an attention toward the great variety of the world, and Murdoch suggests that the ability to direct such attention is love.

In Circadian, her second full-length poetry collection, Joanna Klink’s direction of attention is characterized most accurately by its range, precision, profundity, and the idiomatic subtleties of the book’s urgent vision.

Klink’s world is not a landscape marshaled by the external witness-turned-reflective (a landscape best observed through field glasses) but rather a vast sea into which—even with all her faculties—poet and reader are afforded only partial entry. And it is partial because the voice in her poems is ever-investigatory as it considers the depth of its own appreciation of the world.

Rob Schlegel

Schlegel continued on next page
I have fought
to see, tried to find some way around this…
the world loved and not loved, two fish
shining dark-gold beneath the blurred river
surface—have I loved it enough….

Alternately, Circadian’s gift is its ability to illuminate the “landscape beyond us,” the “pure pe-
riphery, cast into the immobile black,” as well as the speaking distance between two people, above which “a single star [is] streaking in cracked silence.” This is true, in part, because of her ability to describe sce-
narios in which she attempts to imagine alternative outcomes, as in the poem “Antelope”:

What were our hopes
when we first heard that it broke…
…their bodies ghosted
where our minds would have them stall…

Klink heights the sense of hurt when we learn of the antelope’s ultimate fate, an outcome which urges readers into the responsibility of attention while also warning us that once we open our eyes, we are no longer able to choose the depth in which we will be engaged; the light simply fills them, and we are forced to abandon any measure of how much pain we might witness.

In “Terrarium,” one of the most somber poems in the collection, Klink deliberately complicates the boundaries between the speaker’s interior landscape and the physical landscape. The speaker’s ability to “sense the hinge the field / spacious nowhere torn by
violets” invites the reading “torn by violence.” The remainder of the poem suggests the speaker’s
sympathy toward an exterior wilderness (which even-
tually feeds the speaker’s interior wilderness) that is at risk of being “mechanically” or unnaturally con-
tained. On her part, this is like an act of sympathy that ultimately underwrites the activities of the senses, particularly vision. And through this sympathy, the speaker concludes that she must press against
vast borders stitched
to the disappearing trees
a place I love so much
blurred animal at the edge
I have waited
uninjured as the others
were injured do you not
answer me I answer you.

And when speaker and reader hear no answer, we realize that if Klink’s poems are made of percep-
tion, the risk they take is how to convey lamentation for that in the natural world which has been lost or is on the verge of being lost, rather than merely a semblance of lamentation. Klink gives her atten-
tion to how the mind reacts to what the eyes have witnessed, thereby exacting perception through the act of witnessing and thus creating a feedback loop that is sustained throughout the composition of the entire collection.

Klink deliberately complicates the
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This is a loop that also contributes to Klink’s
ability to incorporate the most subtle of sound pat-
terns, which throughout Circadian, belie predictable
calculation by providing readers with a rhythm that
does more than simply mimic the movement of wa-
ter (in all of its forms) and other natural cycles, but allows us to experience moments of brilliant clarity
when vision and sound work in concert so that “Each
ing [is] made in the moment we hear.” (9)

In “Whoever Like You and All Doves” she writes:

Nothing I have seen on earth
is so lost as this expande made
precise in the receding light,
a thousand thousand brittle
stems brushes in audible
reverence to air in whose
surround I am imprinted.

Here, and elsewhere, we become vulnerable to what is there, and by extension are forever impressed by the sovereignty of the visible. But because the relationships between language, transcendence, and the temporal can often suggest great fissures in that sovereignty, reading Circadian becomes an experi-
ence that urges us to feel how love (its deliberate at-
tention) ultimately strains against the undeniable:
I see everywhere the frequent change and the
sorry answers.

And still, what promise is this, what poise,
what poise of what worlds.

AN EMERSONIAN CONNECTION

Every Past Thing

Pamela Thompson

Unbridled Books

http://www.unbridgedbooks.com

336 pages; cloth, $24.95

If you are not familiar with Edwin Romanzo
Elmer’s family portrait “Mourning Picture” (1890),
take a moment to study the cover of Every Past Thing,
as the portrait—featured on the dust jacket—plays a
large role in the debut novel by Pamela Thompson.
The painting is the work for which Elmer is best
known, and features the artist, his wife, and their
young daughter Effie, depicted at the age in which she
met her early death. Thompson’s novel is a fictional
filling in of the holes left open by history’s scant
record of the reclusive Massachusetts artist and his
wife, Mary Elmer. Mary, the book’s protagonist, is
depicted in the painting under the shadow of a tree,
dressed in mourning clothes, a severe look on her
face, a sky blue ball of yarn on her lap, but her hands
left idle. Every Past Thing is a meditative novel, and
this haunting image with its many fine details is the
central meditation that runs throughout. Thompson’s
storytelling is cyclical, and she achieves this medita-
tive quality through her use of repetition, so that by
the end of the novel, it is possible for the reader to
recreate the painting in his or her mind without hav-
ing to close the book and look again on the cover.

The death of Edward and Mary’s daughter
Effie is the tragedy that opens the novel. “With the
ones we love, we know from the start the Story’s
end,” Mary writes in her green book, a volume of
hand-bound papers she fills as the novel progresses.
A story within a story, Thompson uses Mary’s own
writing as a framing device to relate the extensive
backstory of the entire Elmer family while at the
same time confining the actual setting of the novel
to one week in New York City in 1899.

Effie’s death is Mary’s central life tragedy, but
it was not the first or last tragic event to befall her.
The green book is filled mostly with her musings on
the complex feelings she has for Edward’s brother
Samuel, who she fell in love with as a girl; the details
of the illicit affair she had with Jimmy Roberts, a boy
many years her junior; her loveless marriage; her
exploration of transcendentalism and feminism; her
father’s death in the Civil War; and the dark secret
of the Elmer family, housed in the body and mind of
Edward and Samuel’s disturbed Uncle Albert.

Every Past Thing is a meditative
novel.

The green book goes through many incarna-
tions throughout the novel. It is at times Mary’s
simple account of her own life; it is at times a letter to
Effie; it is at times an intended gift for Maud, Mary’s
only niece; and it is at times a sacrificial object, bound
for the bottom of the East River.

There is a cast of tertiary characters that appear
and disappear throughout the course of the novel,
as Mary takes the reader through her childhood
and married life in Western Massachusetts. But 1899
Manhattan, the place and time in which the novel

Mason continued on next page

Schlegel continued from previous page
Michael Horovitz and Alexander Trocchi (author of 
Cain’s Book [1961]) had formed a “Poets’ Co-
operative” to promote public poetry readings as 
part of an “invisible insurrection,” as Trocchi put 
it. In 1965, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 
and Allen Ginsberg were touring Britain, as were 
Fats Waller’s “Ain’t Misbehavin’” through Woody 
Guthrie and Pete Seeger, European Dada and surre 
alism, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Ezra Pound, 
and the BBC, and Mitchell publishing “Tell Me 
Lies About Vietnam” as a broadside poster. 

The elders had experienced National Service 
in the armed forces (a compulsory enlistment for 
two years), whilst the younger had escaped when 
the draft ceased in 1960. All were opposed to war, 
and fell naturally into the emerging Campaign for 
Nuclear Disarmament (CND) which became a focus 
for general antiwar and later anti-Vietnam War po 
itical action. The mass rallies and marches of CND 
were enlivened by folk singers, jazz bands, and poets, 
who became a loosely federated but deeply bound 
movement. 

Much of the culture shared by the British 
underground was accumulated from abroad, from 
American folk and jazz tunes and lyrics—“The 
Saints,” “Down by the Riverside,” Leadbelly’s 
“Goodnight Irene” (the marchers camped overnight), 
Fats Waller’s “Ain’t Misbehavin’” through Woody 
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and so, naturally, to the Beats.

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Stevens continued from previous page

Slim Gaillard, and Pete Townshend.

Horovitz’s project has always been Blakean—looking beneath the surface of social structure to the underlying powers that animate and guide it, through the personal to the spiritual, and beyond the particular to the universal. It is fitting that Horovitz’s latest book should be published in the 250th year commemorating Blake’s birth, and in Blake’s tradition of visionary synthesis—poetry, prose, and illustration.

A New Waste Land is an extended poem in twelve sections, with drawings, paintings, photographs, and cartoons enmeshed within the text, highlighting the concerns not just of our current political-historical context, but of those enduring concerns for liberty and humanity which have been voiced by poets from Jeremiah through Shelley to Langston Hughes and Ginsberg’s invocation at the Albert Hall: “Tonight let’s all make love in London.” Horovitz weaves these poetical threads with skill and clear vision, through the loom of immense knowledge, into his own tapestry of love and hope.

The text of A New Waste Land is informed by copious erudite notes in which the hypocrisy of our political caste is detailed. As example, Horovitz comments on his own section 11, “U-Turn On All This—or Die,” in which he describes “pseudo-millennial Britain” as “a new waste land / over which / a cold central government darkness” prevails with reference to an oft-neglected warning by General Dwight D. Eisenhower as he left the office of US President: we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted.

Blake’s words from “America, a Prophecy” (1793), declaimed by Boston’s Angel, the spirit of liberty and independence, presage those of Eisenhower and Horovitz on our own time, with its ugly surges of wars in the Middle East, rendition, and imprisonment without trial, cloaked in the fine rhetoric of “freedom”:

Why trembles honesty; and, like a murderer,
Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station?
Must the generous tremble, and leave his joy
to the idle, to the pestilence,
That mock him? Who commanded this?
What God? What Angel?
To keep the gen’rous from experience till the ungenerous
Are un-restrain’d performers of the energies of nature;
Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science
That men get rich by; and the sandy desert is giv’n to the strong?
What God is he writes laws of peace, and clothes him in a tempest?
What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs?
What crawling villain preaches abstinence and wraps himself
In fat of lambs? No more I follow, no more obedience pay!

A New Waste Land: Timeship Earth at Nillennium shows Horovitz for the first time at epic scale—a story-teller like the Greek rhapsodies who carried history with their tongues, a psalmist who cannot but sing in praise of life’s beauty, a prophet who sees the future in seeds of yesterday and must speak today. It is his masterwork.

Dave Stevens lives and writes in London. His lyrics, from Patsy by Jack Lee (Dead Fingers Press, 2001) were performed at the Arcola Theatre, London, with music by Sharon Nassauer, under the title “Hey Jack,” in August 2007.