

PATHOS · HUMOR · HISTORY · CREATIVE NON-FICTION

CALLAHAN COUNTY

STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

Poetry Media Service

A MIND IN ACTION
Frank Bidart's poetry embodies its thought process.
By Michael Robbins
Poetry Media Services

Watching the Spring Festival, by Frank Bidart. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$25.00.

"When the body got too discomposed, / I'd just jack off, letting it fall on her . . .": for some reason, I haven't seen Frank Bidart's mind-of-a-serial-killer poem "Herbert White" used to promote National Poetry Month. Bidart has spent the last three decades forging a distinctive and bizarre art, less confessionalist than shock therapist, that privileges "subject matter" over Modernism's legacy of stylistic affronts. In a useful interview with Mark Halliday included in *In the Western Night: Collected Poems 1965-1990*, Bidart contends that a poem is not only a display of Aristotelian mimesis but an action in itself, an idea he expresses at the formal level by presenting his poems in a typographical frenzy of almost Futurist sheen. The poem is "a mind in action":

I had to learn how to use the materials of a poem to think. I said to myself that my poems must seem to embody not merely "thought," but necessary thought. And necessary thought (rather than mere rumination, ratiocination) expresses or acknowledges what has resisted thought, what has forced or irritated it into being.

A cerebral poetry, then, that endlessly seeks a demystifying uncoupling of thought from what passes for thought in a culture that (as the poem "Advice to the Players" in Bidart's last book, *Star Dust*, has it) "does not understand how central making itself is as manifestation and mirror of the self, fundamental as eating or sleeping."

Like Robert Hass and Jack Gilbert, Frank Bidart is a sparse poet with a taxing measure of workmanship, having published only seven books between 1973 and 2005. The poems can at times seem too labored over, too tautly vigilant of superfluous words, but they constitute one of the most painstakingly articulated and syntactically astute studies of emotional life ever undertaken in American letters. Best of all is 2005's *Star Dust*, which contains many of the most elegant lyrics of Bidart's career as well as "The Third Hour of the Night," the most recent section of a poem begun in 1990 that has rightly struck many readers as one of American poetry's enduring productions. "Third Hour" proposes the argument that absorbs Bidart's later poetry:

What you have made.
And now Bidart has made Watching the Spring Festival, his first collection composed solely of shorter lyrics, in which making provides not consolation but illusion of meaning in the no longer theoretical light of mortality:

You believe not in words but in words in lines, which disdaining the right margin

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Inside time make the snake made out of time pulse without cease electric in space

Like the invisible seasons

Though the body is its genesis, a poem is the vision of a process

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Carved in space, vision your poor eye's single armor against winter spring summer fall

—From "Winter Spring Summer Fall"

Though this book largely eschews the idiosyncratic punctuation and typography of Bidart's earlier work, his mastery of enjambment here is precision-tooled. Line breaks defer semantic resolution as syntax clots with possibility:

How those now dead used the word love bewildered and disgusted the boy who resolved he

would not reassure the world he felt love until he understood love

Resolve that too soon crumbled when he found within his chest

something intolerable for which the word because no other word was right

must be love must be love

Love craved and despised and necessary the Great American Songbook said explained our fate

—From "Valentine"
Bidart's snaky syntax forces the mind to double back and revise, mirroring and impelling the action of thought. Formally, it resembles nothing so much as the examples Noam Chomsky comes up with to illustrate the mind's ability to make sense of complex referential relations: "The horse raced past the barn fell." Like Chomsky, Bidart revels in the creative and literally infinite potentialities of language use.

With no long poem for Bidart to magic, the new collection is a bit slighter than *Star Dust* and 1997's *Desire*. The centerpiece, a 10-page meditation on the Russian ballerina Galina Ulanova's performance of Adolphe Adam's *Giselle*—"Ulanova came to Pomona California in // 1957 as light projected on a screen // to make me early in college see what art is"—is the sole typically Bidartian amalgam of verse and prose set to heated italics. But no less than its predecessors, *Watching the Spring Festival* forces and irritates us into thought. Bidart is one of those rare artists, like Sonic Youth or John Ashbery, whose every new work is worth buying the day it appears on the shelves.

Michael Robbins is a doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago. His poems and reviews have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Chicago Review*, and other publications. This article first appeared in *Poetry* magazine. Distributed by the Poetry Foundation. Read more about Frank Bidart, and his poetry, at www.poetryfoundation.org.

Submissions sought to:

Star
P.O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448
email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or libelable material.

Three Poems From Poetry Selected For The Pushcart Prize

CHICAGO - *Poetry* magazine is pleased to announce that three poems featured recently in its pages have been selected for inclusion in *The Pushcart Prize XXXIV: Best of the Small Presses* (2010 edition): David Yezzi's "The Good News" (June 2007), Louise Glück's "Midsummer" (February 2008), and Geoffrey Brock's "Daddy: 1933" (June 2008). Touted by the *Chicago Tribune* as "[t]he ex-officio house organ for the American literary cosmos," *The Pushcart Prize-Best of the Small Presses* series, published since 1976, presents an annual selection of outstanding poetry, short stories, and essays from hundreds of presses across the country. "We're delighted with the

selection of these three poems," said Christian Wiman, editor of *Poetry*. "For both the poets and the magazine, it's a great honor to be recognized by *The Pushcart Prize* series."

Geoffrey Brock is a poet and translator whose first book *Weighing Light* won the New Criterion Poetry Prize. He teaches at the University of Arkansas. Louise Glück's most recent book of poems, *Averno*, was a 2006 National Book Award finalist. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and teaches at Yale.

David Yezzi is the executive editor of the *New Criterion*. A former Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford University, he is the author of *The Hidden Model*, *Sad Is Eros*, and most recently *Azores*.

Rhymes You Can Use:

Constabulary
Extraordinary
Tertiary
Salivary
Honorary
Hairy

Because It's Right

Lead me not into temptation
Lest I should do such things I might
Chart my every situation
Because it's me...because it's right.

Hold my hand when seas I'm crossing
Buoy me high sealed so firm and tight
To face the swells angry tossing
Because it's me, because it's right.

Lift me up when down I'm sinking
To newly shine with potent light
Sweep each corner of my thinking
Because it's me...because it's right.

Keep my heart with careful molding
To bask anew in love's delight
Yours at end of times unfolding
Because it's me and because it's right.

- Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas

American Life In Poetry

Column 217

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

American literature is rich with poems about the passage of time, and the inevitability of change, and how these affect us. Here is a poem by Kevin Griffith, who lives in Ohio, in which the years accelerate by their passing.

Spinning

I hold my two-year-old son under his arms and start to twirl. His feet sway away from me and the day becomes a blur. Everything I own is flying into space: yard toys, sandbox, tools, garage and house, and, finally, the years of my life.

When we stop, my son is a grown man, and I am very old. We stagger back into each other's arms one last time, two lost friends heavy with drink, remembering the good old days.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Poem copyright (c)2006 by Kevin Griffith, whose most recent book of poetry is "Denmark, Kangaroo, Orange," Pearl Editions, 2007. Poem reprinted from "Mid-American Review," Vol. 26, no. 2, 2006, by permission of Kevin Griffith and the publisher. Introduction copyright (c)2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Words You Can Use:

Dormition: When you fall asleep, you are committing this act.

Extorse: In baseball, if you are facing away from home plate, you are standing "extorse." This is probably not helpful to the team.

Ginglymus: This is a joint with a hinge at the junction. It is not known which set of carpenters originated this word, but it works.

Hordeaceous: If you have something like the grain "barley," or pertaining to an aspect of it, then you can describe it with this word, if you need to.

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will

be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.

3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor
Eastland/Callahan County
Newspapers
P. O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net
Fax: 254-629-2092