

volume of whose Nixon biography, about to be published by Simon and Schuster, was in danger of seeming outdated before it even reached the stores (and, though of only minor importance, it also might protect the Hays Gorey-Maureen Dean memoir, also published by S&S, from seeming even more worthless than it is).

So whom did the *Times Book Review* select to review *Silent Coup*? None other than Professor Stephen Ambrose. He delivered a review of singular nastiness, full of inaccuracies. But what he didn't reveal in his review was that a year before *Silent Coup* was published, he had written Colodny at the suggestion of "Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and others," offering to trade "findings and conclusions." When Colodny refused, Ambrose phoned him and, according to Colodny's notes on the conversation, said, in what could have been taken as a threat, that "a historian like himself could make or break this type of book." When evidence of Ambrose's conflict of interest was presented to the *Times*, it was forced to issue an apology, saying on July 7, "If the editors had known of Mr. Ambrose's letter and Mr. Colodny's response, the book would have been assigned to a different reviewer." But of course this apology did nothing to lessen the damage of the review.

The whole episode was so embarrassing to the *Times* that when the *New York Post* got hold of a letter protesting the Ambrose review from St. Martin's editor George Witte to *Review* editor Rebecca Sinkler, one of the top editors at the *Review* became so hysterically furious as to call St. Martin's and tell them not to bother to send any more of their catalogues—in effect putting the publishing house on the *Times*'s hit list. Tom McCormack, chair of St. Martin's, took the threat seriously enough that he called from London, where he was buying titles, to try to work things out with the *Review*. (That account comes from Colodny; frightened flacks at St. Martin's deny the story.)

We will have to wait to see what influence *Silent Coup* has on other Nixon historians besides Morris and Parmet. But the book's effect on Woodward is bound to be felt almost at once.

The press, normally so defensive of one of its heroes, has begun to sound suspicious, sometimes even contemptuous, of Woodward. Many are tired of his quest for what he calls "holy shit" stories. Many remember that he was one of the

Post editors who didn't press Janet Cooke for the sources (she had none) for "Jimmy's World," the hoax that won (and lost) a Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

But mainly his reputation is getting kicked around because he seemingly considers himself too important to be held to the basic rules of historical writing. His books are stunningly free of footnotes and sources. He seems to feel no need for proof. At first his reputation, born of Watergate, let him get away with it. No more.

The dike began to burst and the criticism to flood through when Woodward wrote his book about the C.I.A., in which he claimed that he had somehow sneaked into Director Casey's hospital room and received a deathbed confession that Casey had been involved in the Iran/*contra* illegalities. Did Woodward have the confession on tape? No. Did he have witnesses? No. Readers just had to take his word for the unlikely episode. Many didn't. Hoots and jeers were

heard from all corners of the press.

Then came *The Commanders*, Woodward's account of how the decision was made to go to war in the gulf. It triggered a new wave of taunts about his research technique. James Atlas, writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, wondered if Woodward made things up: "Are his 'quotations' actual quotations, or Woodward's version of what people told him others said?" And to Anthony Lewis's recommendation that *The Commanders* has "the ring of authority," Atlas responded, "But is it true?"

Suddenly we are on a more dramatic plateau of skepticism, and the reaction to *Silent Coup* may keep us there. Doug Ireland, media critic for *The Village Voice*, puts Atlas's query even more harshly. Reviewing *Silent Coup*, he opened with the question: "Is Bob Woodward a liar?" When a reporter's peers begin asking that question publicly, even if he is the most famous reporter in the country, he is in real trouble. □

Memory's Citizen

JESSICA GREENBAUM

ROSE. By Li-Young Lee. BOA Editions Limited. 71 pp. Paper \$8.

THE CITY IN WHICH I LOVE YOU. By Li-Young Lee. BOA Editions Limited. 90 pp. \$18. Paper \$9.

Sometimes poets seem like the orators at Speakers' Corner—I can see them now, stacking their well-built stanzas like orange crates, stepping to the top with a deep breath and saying what they have to say. Readers, meanwhile, mill about the edges of the literary park, hoping to be caught by a poet's music or gossip, by the telescopic insinuation of worlds or by the expansive description of them. Sometimes a poet's voice distinguishes itself by carrying authority and by addressing a singular authority. That has been my experience reading Li-Young Lee's poems.

Lee's first book, *Rose* (1986), opens with "Epistle," his letter to the world, as Dickinson called her poems. It ends:

Before it all gets wiped away, let me say,

Jessica Greenbaum, who has won the Discovery-Nation poetry prize and PEN's New Writer award, is an editor at Choice Magazine Listening, a free literary periodical-on-tape for the blind and disabled.

there is wisdom in the slender hour
which arrives between two shadows.

It is not heavenly and it is not sweet.
It is accompanied by steady human
weeping,
and twin furrows between the brows,
but it is what I know,
and so am able to tell.

Some of the biographical background for this solemn introduction is well known by now. Both Lee's books carry biographical notes (a whole page in *The City in Which I Love You*) and his interview in Bill Moyers's WNET series *The Power of the Word* supplied more. Lee was born in 1957, to Chinese parents then living in Jakarta, Indonesia. His father had been Mao's personal physician and then professor of English and philosophy at Gamaliel University in Jakarta. The senior Lee ended up a political prisoner under Indonesia President Sukarno and spent two years in prison before escaping and fleeing the country. A nearly five-year trek through Hong Kong, Macao and Japan led the family to the United States, where Lee's father, "the critical 'myth' " of Lee's work, became a "Presbyterian minister in a tiny western Pennsylvania town, full of rage and mystery and pity, blind and silent at the end." Lee's father died in 1980.

The above quotations are from Gerald Stern's introduction to *Rose*. In the late

1970s, Stern was Lee's mentor at the University of Pittsburgh, and Stern's preface to *Rose*—his introduction of Lee to the literary world—still stands as the most valuable prose about Lee's work. The plain-spokenness of Lee's poems is coupled with a fearlessness of direction which Stern calls "a willingness to let the sublime enter his field of concentration." This "willingness," paired with Lee's unorthodox imagery, makes a powerful team. In *Rose* we hear this brave combo in the last stanza of "Dreaming of Hair":

Sometimes my love is melancholy
and I hold her head in my hands.
Sometimes I recall our hair grows
after death.

Then, I must grab handfuls
of her hair, and, I tell you, there
are apples, walnuts, ships sailing,
ships docking, and men
taking off their boots, their hearts
breaking,
not knowing
what they love more, the water, or
their women's hair, sprouting from
the head, rushing toward the feet.

Lee's task seems sometimes to remember the life of his father *for* him, to plot the moving figure, the migrant political prisoner whose character kept evolving when the mad dash was over. We often get the sense that Lee feels only one step ahead of the oblivion of inarticulateness (and always a few steps behind his father). Unlike the picture one gets of other poets—Ashbery, for instance, who comes to mind (regardless of his incalculable labors) as being in repose or absently surveying a garden—Lee comes across as a man bent over a drafting table, erasing, rewriting, sweating more than he wishes. In *Rose's* poem "Mnemonic" he says:

A serious man who devised complex
systems of numbers and rhymes
to aid him in remembering, a man who
forgot nothing, my father
would be ashamed of me.
Not because I'm forgetful,
but because there is no order
to my memory, a heap
of details, uncatalogued, illogical.

Rose announces Lee's obsessions but also bears the innate triumph of ordering language. In the poem "Persimmons" Lee takes revenge on the teacher who humiliated him for confusing the fruit's name with the word "precision." And who is more precise than the poet, writing about persimmons that a blind father painted from precise memory? In the poem, the father, when handed his own scroll-painting of persimmons, says:

*Oh the feel of the wolftail on the silk,
the strength, the tense
precision in the wrist.*

*I painted them hundreds of times
eyes closed. These I painted blind.
Some things never leave a person.
scent of the hair of the one you love,
the texture of persimmons
in your palm, the ripe weight.*

Rose won the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award from New York University and, like its title, offers the reader a complicated, beautiful, burdened, opening blossom. *The City in Which I Love You*, published four years

later, was the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1990. In *The City*, dreaminess and the urgency of ordering memory still seem braided; dream, or the travel between the dead and the living, between truth and the imagination, and between refugee status and citizenship, seems, in fact, to be the vehicle for ordering memory. Blind feeling, or feeling memorized onto the soul, as with the father's painting of persimmons, is still the way to the truthful depiction of life's experiences.

The long opening poem of the volume, "Furious Versions," gives the impression of the poet floating, like a Chagall figure,

The Biography of Alice B. Toklas

Linda Simon

"A study that shows Toklas as she must have been—a multifaceted and complex creature with her own tastes and standards [her story] is an emotionally stirring experience."

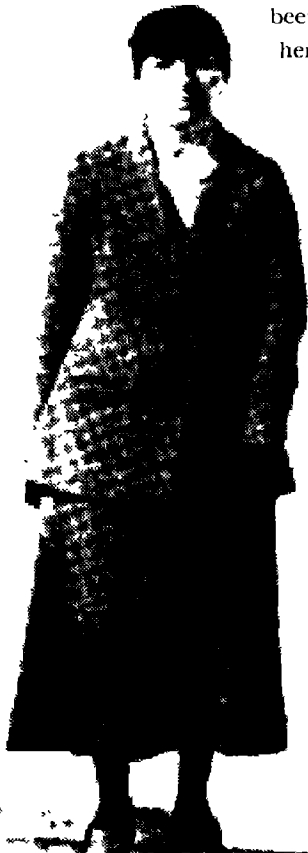
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Sylvia Beach
Introduction
by James Laughlin

"[Miss Beach's] reminiscences are literally an index of everybody in the twenties, and she knew them all"—Janet Flanner, *New Yorker*. In 1919 Sylvia Beach opened an American bookshop in Paris called Shakespeare and Company
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through the lives of his family, scouting for their stories through a kind of relaxed levitation in liquid time. The poet observes the world's images metamorphosing, like a lava lamp, and tries to metamorphose with them. Aside from the first line's awkward verb—"These days I waken in the used light"—the poem generally feels effortless and effervescent.

Or I might have one more
hour of sleep before my father
comes to take me
to his snowbound church
where I dust the pews and he sets
candles
out the color of teeth.

And I wonder
if I imagined those wintry mornings
in a dim nave, since
I'm the only one
who's lived to tell it,
and I confuse
the details; was it my father's skin
which shone like teeth?
Was it his heart that lay snowbound?
But if I waken to a jailer

what name do I answer to?

There's a fabulous passage in part 5 of the poem, an image that another, more opportunistic poet might have used to wrest an entire poem:

Once, while I walked
with my father, a man
reached out, touched his arm, said,
Kuo Yuan?
The way he stared and spoke my
father's name
I thought he meant to ask, *Are you a
dream?*
Here was the sadness of ten thousand
miles,
of an abandoned house in Nan Jing,
where my father helped a blind man
wash his wife's newly dead body,
then bury it, while bombs
fell, and trees raised
charred arms and burned
Here was a man who remembered
the sound of another's footfalls
so well as to call to him
after twenty years
on a sidewalk in America.

Once the imagination is receptive, Lee might be saying, you can find anyone.

Perhaps one of his "simpler" poems, but one whose concept and execution I still find wonderful, "This Room and Everything in It," describes another "mnemonic," another formula for memory, as taught by the speaker's father:

I am letting this room
and everything in it

stand for my ideas about love
and its difficulties.

I'll let your love-cries,
those spacious notes
of a moment ago,
stand for distance. . . .

and so on, each thing
standing for a separate idea,
and those ideas forming the
constellation
of my greater idea.
And one day, when I need
to tell myself something intelligent
about love,

I'll close my eyes
and recall this room and everything
in it.

The room is one architecture for memory,
the stanza another.

Lee has been compared to Whitman;
in fact, Judith Kitchen, writing in *The*

Georgia Review, has said Lee may sound too much like him. The father-of-us-all does stride through the book's last and most challenging poem, "The Cleaving" (which, for all the hoopla, including a Pushcart Prize, doesn't swoop me up). The poem's speaker finds himself—while ordering roast duck at the Chinese grocery—in an epiphanic moment. His relationship to the butcher, to food, to the machinery of the body, and the interrelationship of all these elements, swirl about him and illuminate his relationship to his own soul and the soul of others. A string of images about lovemaking begins, "The noise the body makes/when the body meets/the soul over the soul's ocean and penumbra," and ends, "an engine crossing,/re-crossing salt water, hauling/immigrants and the junk/of the poor." And so the poet gives us something else to remember. □

How-To: A Love Story

RICHARD LINGEMAN

"How-To Book on Suicide Surges to Top of Best-Seller List in Week"

—*The New York Times*

Say hi to Madge and Donald. They don't know each other yet, but they will, since this is a love story. As New Yorkers they experience all the tensions of urban life, and like everyone else in their age and income bracket, they feel they aren't Realizing Their Inner Potential.

Madge decided that her problem was that she was too self-effacing. So she bought a self-help book: Dr. G. Alvaro de la Blanc's best-selling *Blow Your Own Horn: A Guide to Self-Assertiveness*. She had a soft little voice: Dr. de la Blanc taught her to speak resonantly from her diaphragm. He exhorted her to be a Triple-A Person: Aggressive, Assertive and Annoying. This book worked so well that she mustered the courage to tell off her boss, who had treated her like a piece of furniture.

While job hunting, she began reading Dr. Wolf Krauthammer's *Howl for Happiness*. Dr. Krauthammer taught that the birth trauma has made us all neurotic and that we must be reborn. Madge followed Dr. Krauthammer's exercises, lying naked on a blanket and screaming at the top of her lungs (the "Primal Howl"). This enabled her to get in touch with her true feelings of outrage at leaving a nice

cozy womb. After a few days her neighbors called the police.

After finding a new apartment, she decided to improve her human relations skills and purchased the latest best seller by Dr. Leo Bruschetta, Ph.D. M.B.A., P.C., *Loving Everybody*, which taught her that life was like Mama's spaghetti sauce—"a littla this, a littla that"—and that if the world could only be like a big warm loving Italian family there would be no more wars. But when she went hunting for a job in her specialty, personnel, nobody would hire her because they thought she was too nice.

So she purchased Dr. Erwin Kreplach's *You're No. 1! You're No. 1!*, which was Number 5 on the *New York Times* best-seller list that week. Dr. Kreplach taught her that feeling sorry for other people was actually egotism. Giving a homeless person a quarter, for example, was playing God with their lives. As Dr. Kreplach wrote, "Who are we to say whether they should live or die?" This philosophy made her comfortable with the idea of firing people. How did she know that somebody shouldn't be out on the streets? Who was she—God?

Such sentiments made it easy to get a job in personnel. Madge was immediately hired by a large, downsizing corporation to fire 200 people. She succeeded so well that her job was eliminated.

Madge spent a lot of time feeling sorry for herself. She went on junk-food binges and gained twenty-five pounds. She be-

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