



Photograph by Meredith Heuer

Daniel Handler (a.k.a. Lemony Snicket)

Books of Poetry I found especially useful this year:

Gwendolyn Brooks – *Blacks*

Anslem Hollo – *Sojourner Microcosms*

Robert Fernandez – *Scarecrow*

Samuel Amadon – *Listener*

Louis MacNeice – *Autumn Journal*

Caroline Bird – *The Hat Stand Union*

Ada Limon – *The Carrying*

Atsuro Riley – *Romey's Order*

Elizabeth Bishop – *Questions of Travel*

whoever wrote Gilgamesh – *Gilgamesh*

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LOADS OF LEARNED LUMBER

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- Robert Fernandez, _Scarecrow_
 - John Palatella
- Erik Campbell, _The Corpse Pose_
- Peter Gizzi, _The Outernationale_
- Miriam Toews, _All My Puny Sorrows_

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2016

Robert Fernandez, _Scarecrow_

ANOTHER GREAT BOOK from Fernandez. Not the fever-tunnel that *Pink Reef* was--still intense, though, but in a different way. *Scarecrow* lets you up for air once in a while, but threads of visionary obsession (colors, rhythms) still hold things closely together.

I want to be careful here, because I have noticed that poets under forty are not as keen about being compared to T. S. Eliot as they were back when I myself was under forty (over twenty years ago...let's leave it at that). As with, say, Stevens, these days Eliot's prestige is a little frayed around the edges--all that Anglican, Royalist, Classicist side of him, I imagine, not to mention the poisonous anti-Semitism.

But there is a visionary obsessive vein in Eliot, too. "What the Thunder Said," for instance, or some of the middle sections of *Ash Wednesday*, or the more hallucinatory passages in *Four Quartets*--"Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axletree"--*that* vein.

The jacket flap copy notes, "Taking Dante and other catalogers of failure and ruin (Baudelaire, Trakl, Rimbaud) as its guiding lights, *Scarecrow* charts situations of extremity and madness." Dante filtered through the Symbolists--exactly. *That's* the Eliot I'm talking about, and that's the Eliot I love, and that's the Eliot who would make a useful Virgil as you negotiated the landscape of *Scarecrow*.

The title poem, which opens the volume, could almost be a brilliant re-mix of "The Hollow Men": the scarecrow, the heat, the dust, the suggestion of a setting in the afterlife ("all detritus of coming near / the realm of the dead"), the abrupt fragment of Biblical language ("Pity / them Lord for they know not / what they do"), the shards of lyricism hinting at both ecstasy and terror:

BLOG ARCHIVE

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ABOUT ME



THEOBALD

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*I drool
on locust bouquets and steps
of honey. Come*

*Meet your master
in the dust; with his
one tooth, he drains
you dry.*

If that gave you, as it did me, that weird little feeling at the top of the spine, you need to go find *Scarecrow* now and not wait until Garrison Keillor reads it on "Writer's Almanac," because...well, you know, because that is probably *not going to happen*.

POSTED BY [THEOBALD](#) AT [12:35 PM](#)

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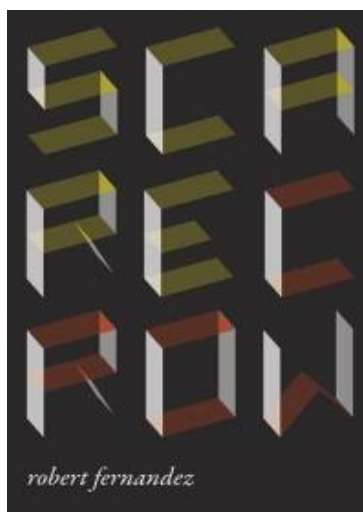
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The Definitive List of Must-Read Poetry Books from 2016 (So Far)

Books (<http://flavorwire.com/category/books>) | By Jonathon Sturgeon (<http://flavorwire.com/author/jonathon-sturgeon>) and Shane Barnes (<http://flavorwire.com/author/shanekealoha>) | June 16, 2016



Scarecrow, Robert Fernandez (February; Wesleyan)

Robert Fernandez's third collection of poetry overflows with mentions of food. The flapjacks, cabbage leaves, spaghetti, and whatever else fill this thing up with viscera that embodies a basic existentialism in such physical terms that the work, as a whole, makes a case for life not only as a thing that must be lived, but one that can be easily wasted through inaction. It is as motivating a work as a book of poetry can be. – SB



(<http://flavorwire.com/580556/must-read-poetry-books-from-2016-so-far>)



(<http://flavorwire.com/580556/must-read-poetry-books-from-2016-so-far/3>)

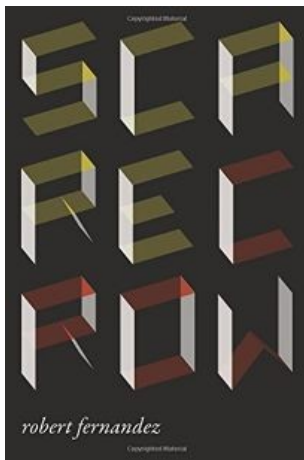
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BEST BOOKS

AUTHORS

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



Scarecrow

Robert Fernandez. Wesleyan Univ., \$24.95 (80p)
ISBN 978-0-8195-7650-7

Tweet

MORE BY AND ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Fernandez (*Pink Reef*) imbues his dark third collection with omens, mortality panic, and a Rimbaud-esque frenzied bleakness, punctuating the work with moments of desperate hope. Packing poems with Gothic details that produce a visceral reaction, he impels readers to "Crack dread's/ red egg on/ the burning rock" and "Drain that bourbon/ to the red, to the dre-/ gs of silt" as Fernandez pivots between sinister and debauched revelry, "portents dissolving like fat." The landscape is polluted and populated by sinister figures, "love's ghouls," and wolves with "bright Prussias of hazel eyes." The speaker pines and resigns in turn, occasionally becoming self-pitying but always artfully aware. "I cultivate a certain dying," Fernandez writes, "I comb it/ with exceeding carefulness." These anxieties are neither feigned nor entirely intangible; they veer into the specific with pleas to "Help us not become wards of the state." The work also avoids becoming self-involved, with readers eagerly encouraged to participate: "what's your burden," the speaker needles, "what makes your stomach a withery/ pit?" Fernandez inventively toys with form, using line breaks to enhance the emotional depth of a moment ("mal-/ aise ma-/ laise m-/ a-l-a-i-s-e"), but his dexterity is best displayed in creating and sustaining a mood of ardent desperation heightened by reverent pleas for perseverance—a continuing on "through the night,/ through morning,/ again again again." (Feb.)

DETAILS

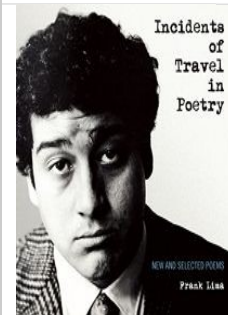
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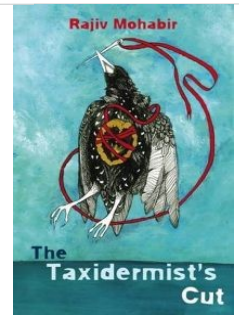
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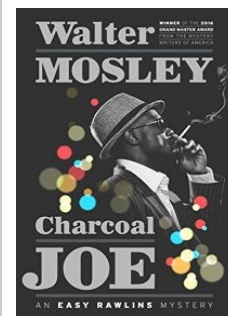
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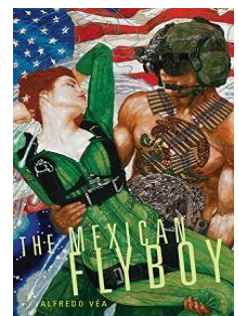
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May 2016 Exemplars: Poetry Reviews by Grace Cavalieri

Grace Cavalieri

May 16, 2016

Spring's GNP (Great National Products)



photo by Dan Murano

A roundup of the best poetry (26 new books) in no particular order:

Prose

Letters from Langston: from the Harlem Renaissance to the Red Scare edited by **Evelyn Louise Crawford and Mary Louise Patterson**. Foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley. University of California Press. 343 pages.

Poetry

Sample poems from the following books are found below:

Chaos Theories by **Elizabeth Hazen**. Alan Squire Publishing. 71 pages.

The Book of Landings by **Mark McMorris**. Wesleyan University Press. 194 pages.

At the End of the Self-Help Rope by **Ed Zahniser**. New Academia/Scarith. 65 pages.

The Collected Poems: E. Ethelbert Miller edited by **Kirsten Porter**. Willow Books. 462 pages.

The Thinking Eye by **Jennifer Atkinson**. Parlor Press. 64 pages.

Spool by **Matthew Cooperman**. Parlor Press. 101 pages

Azure: Poems and Selections from the "Livre" by **Stéphane Mallarmé**,

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February 2016 Exemplars: Poetry Reviews by Grace Cavalieri

by Grace Cavalieri

A monthly feature that looks at books of and about poetry.

Poetry

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June 2015 Exemplars: Poetry Reviews by Grace Cavalieri

by Grace Cavalieri

A monthly feature that looks at books of and about poetry.

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translated by Blake Bronson-Bartlett & Robert Fernandez. 203 pages.

100 Chinese Silences by Timothy Yu. Les Figues Press. 135 pages.

Bright Stranger by Katherine Soniat. LSU Press. 78 pages.

Rock Taught by David McAleavey. Broadkill River Press. 81 pages.

Why Is It So Hard To Kill You? by Barrett Warner. Somondoco Press. 61 pages.

Matchstick & Bramble by Lucy Simpson. Broadkill Press. 58 pages.

Don't Be Interesting by Jacob McArthur Mooney. McClelland & Stewart. 81 pages.

The Names by Tim Lilburn. McClelland & Stewart. 65 pages.

Settler Education by Laurie D. Graham. McClelland & Stewart. 105 pages.

Blood Hyphen by Kenny Williams. Oberlin College Press. 79 pages.

Desecrations by Matt Rader. McClelland & Stewart. 79 pages.

English Kills by Monica Wendel. Coal Hill Review. 17 pages.

Scarecrow by Robert Fernandez. Wesleyan University Press. 66 pages.

Beyond Elsewhere by Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac, translated by Helene Cardona. White Pine Press. 59 pages.

Five Sextillion Atoms by Jayne Benjulian. Saddle Road Press. 71 pages.

The Absence of Knowing by Matthew Henriksen. Black Ocean. 77 pages.

I Am the Season That Does Not Exist in the World by Kim Kyung Ju. Black Ocean. 122 pages.

Porridge by Richard Garcia. Press 53. 66 pages.

Constellarium by Jordan Rice. Orison Books. 87 pages

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POEMS

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Chaos Theories by Elizabeth Hazen. Alan Squire Publishing. 71 pages.

FINAL THEORY

Our expectation is a sphere, the perfect alignment of mouth and eyes, a Rorschach blot, a butterfly, but symmetry is not merely reflection. Throughout nature objects

skew, land erodes, our memories are a jumble, yet there is symmetry in repetition: stars, pixels, sleeplessness, the apparition of his face like headlights in a tunnel.

Scientists claim universal symmetry,

of the mountain's hollow inside
 I ordered shrimp. Each pink body
 curled on the plate like a tendoned larva.
 Maybe it wasn't really a shrimp between us.
 Maybe it was something we had made.
 Now I'm waiting for the subway.
 All morning I heard its roar from inside the earth.
 It said, *the next train is now arriving*
on the Far Rockaway track, please stand away
from the platform edge.
 It said, *there is train traffic ahead of us,*
please be patient. A person can travel
 for hours underground
 and never leave this city.
 Sometimes it feels like the future
 will never arrive
 and I can hear the chambers of your heart
 echoing with laughter.

+++++

Scarecrow by **Robert Fernandez**. Wesleyan University Press. 66 pages.

we adorn

I ask for the broken ladder to fill my head
 for sunstroke, red horns of wheat
 For dailiness, let me know particulars
 O red horn brightened in my chest,
 the hairs are countless, I ask
 for lozenges like islands, and the color —
 red yellow blue — staining the dark
 I ask for daylight, forms noticed, held, cut
 down from shadow and trembling, held
 for the moon's horn filled with red honey
 and for the chance of day, a gamble with red chips

The time is taken, culled, like
 fruit the time has darkened, blue,
 seven panes of glass crushed into the roots
 the time is deadly, a coral snake
 and we adorn, we adorn

+++++

Beyond Elsewhere by **Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac**, translated by **Helene Cardona**.

White Pine Press. 59 pages.

The pact with the heavens is broken. Paradise escapes
 beneath our feet: a cursed wind insists on making us fall
 from above ourselves, with implacable patience. Month
 after month, every stone of our imaginary temple collapses
 in a slow attack on reality.

With the last breath of passion, all that remains of our
 faces are fallen icons: two angelic visages torn by the blade
 of a love profaned to vestiges. Only our soulless faces and
 eyes remain, unable to withstand the vision of the fall.

I am seriously so behind when it comes to consuming new media! I can't think of any movie i saw this year, and a lot of the music i listen to is old records, but I have three poetry books that i read this year that i'd recommend! ***There Should Be Flowers*** by Joshua Jennifer Esponiza / ***Dream With a Glass Chamber*** by Aricka Forman - both of those were published 2016. The book that shook me the most, that I'd say was my favorite this year was probably ***Extracting the Stone of Madness*** by Alejandra Pizarnik, which are poems from 62-72 but I believe that it was finally translated to English this year or late last year. 😊

Joe Milazzo

Writer, editor, educator, and designer.

Best Book:

Poetry

Scarecrow -Robert Fernandez

Fiction

Eve Out of Her Ruins -Ananda Devi (publsihed by Deep Vellum)

Non-Fiction

The Yesterday Project -Ben & Sandra Doller

Best Movie:

Don't Think Twice -Mike Birbiglia

Best Album:

Sunergy -Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith & Suzanne Ciani

Michelle Newby

Lone Star Literary Life.

Best Book:

Fiction

News of the World -Paulette Jiles

Check her review (http://www.lonestarliterary.com/jiles,-news-of-the-world_101616.html).

Non-Fiction

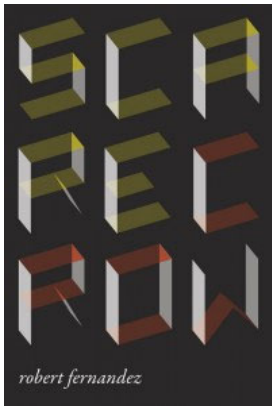
Walking the LLano -Shelley Armitage

Check her review. (http://www.lonestarliterary.com/armitage,-walking-the-llano_032016.html)

About the Book

- **Author:** Robert Fernandez
- **Reviewed By:** Kent Shaw
- **Genre:** Poetry (<https://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/genre/poetry/>).
- **Publisher:** Wesleyan University Press (<http://www.upne.com/0819576507.html>)
- **Published:** 2016
- **Pages:** 88

Book Review



(<http://www.upne.com/0819576507.html>) Perhaps you are already a reader of Robert Fernandez, or you have been in the past. Perhaps you have identified two poles in Fernandez's work: the opaque, filigreed voice of *We Are Pharaoh* (Canarium Books, 2011) and the drenched sentimentality of *Pink Reef* (Canarium Books, 2013). At one end, Fernandez's first book *We Are Pharaoh* is a charged density, a voice echoing up a brain's deep crevices. Fernandez poses an intellectual, referential voice that is continually confounding a consistent line of thought. At the other pole, there is the supersaturated and emotive voice of *Pink Reef*. This voice is absorbed and insular. How, then, to reconcile the two poles? They seem like opposites, but as deep, earnest reckonings, they are both reasonable responses to a confounding and bewildering world.

Fernandez's third book, *Scarecrow*, continues that reckoning. It uses a densely considered, sometimes bare, often elliptical, but always emotional frame. For my reading, the poems in *Scarecrow* should be viewed via a conceptual scarecrow figure that resides within the poems. Who or what is this scarecrow? It's not really the speaker, though there

are moments when the speaker shows a familiarity with the scarecrow ("Scarecrow, we are two of a kind"). One of the pleasures of the book is personally reckoning with Fernandez's handling of the "scarecrow." It could represent the trope of a scarecrow. The poem could refer to the scarecrow in either third person or second person. In some poems, "scarecrow" is an expressive persona, told sometimes in the singular, sometimes in the plural. There are poems in which the scarecrow feels like a population of scarecrows. There are times when a single poem could shift easily from one pronoun to another. I'm not sure how I would describe the final effect. There is this odd collective centering of perspective. Consider the opening to "it would be better if you tasted rain":

It would be better if you tasted rain
than this spiced asphalt,
leavened brown horizon and flapjack
blacktop

—

Pollution gets in the skin, spices it
red brown red yellow red brown,
so we

—

Take a swim beyond the dusty chambers of summer

When I read this, I see the "you" from the opening to be the poem's speaker addressing a scarecrow, giving it advice. "It would be better if you tasted rain," a kind of poetic advice you might offer to a scarecrow figure. Of course, the reality of this world is more "spiced asphalt," and the subsequent imagistic descriptions of the asphalt provide even more insight into what the scarecrow is actually tasting. But then, there is a turn at the end of the second section: "so we." Suddenly, the speaker is experiencing this same world as the scarecrow (or the "you"), and they are together opting to take a swim.

While this reading might seem like a fairly conventional move in any poem, there is a rhythm in this poem that throws off those expectations. The observation about pollution in the second section seems to send the poem in a very different direction, further developing the speaker's concern about what the scarecrow is currently experiencing. "So we // Take a swim" is jarring; it pulls the reader away from this imagistic description of pollution. Additionally, it is underplayed as this diminutive line at the tail end of the second section. As Jonathan Culler discusses the lyric address in his recent book *Theory of the Lyric*, this kind of poetic turn to a "we" would often be part of a potent rhetorical gesture, but that shift is buried through the section break and rhythm of the poem.

The result is a flattened landscape of scarecrows with sudden personal or emotive contours thrown in so that the trope of "person as scarecrow" is never allowed to settle, nor does it become a cheap mythology that the book needs to develop over the course of many poems. Fernandez's book doesn't use the scarecrow in the same way other books centered around a mythological project might use or exploit a similar central figure. The figure of the scarecrow never tires, and the poem gains gravity. For instance, in "rogue estates":

Rest of peace. And rogue estates.
Rest of peace where wells blacken.
Rogue estates
dominoes fall to table chatter.
At some streetlight, a fountain,
no names for us homes for us
here, no meals
no medicines for what we missed.

Without scarecrows, this is, of course, a bleak landscape. The "rogue estates" are more ominous because they are populated. They are more remote, and the scarecrows that are there are more precarious. The whole concept of the phrase "rest of peace" feels euphemistic for "peace," but hardly peaceful.

Perhaps this framework puts *Scarecrow* closer to Fernandez's first book, *We Are Pharaoh*, but this dense poetic work is not the entirety of the book. There are plenty of moments of exclamatory poetry, for instance, in "who makes a chorus of you here":

Who makes a chorus of you here,
let's bring him colorful fruits and flowers,
every stanching of colorful flowers to fill the wells
and wounds, garlands of fruit-colored silvery flowers
for necks and heads and thighs and arms and wrists, help
us purveyors of mystery bring beauty to the brown dust form
of day, let us

The situation here might be a bit more complicated than simply adulating the "him" responsible for making "you" into a chorus. After all, what does it mean to make "you" into a chorus? How do the typically joyful objects like "garlands of fruit-colored flowers" stanch wounds at the neck and head, etc.? And what, exactly, would the "dust form of day" consist of? However, the more recognizable celebration here offers a broad emotional access for a reader—a point that pulls the book more to that emotive pole of *Pink Reef*.

All of this, really, should be a concrete argument in favor of becoming a reader of Robert Fernandez's work. For his welcome complexity, his inescapable earnestness, and his felt sentiment. I find myself thinking of this book as an opportunity to further develop how or what would allow me to understand Robert Fernandez's voice, as well as the voices of other poets who continue to hold a conversation with the world. And what a distinct pleasure it is to view into that world.

About the Reviewer

Kent Shaw's first book, *Calenture*, was published in 2008. His poems have appeared in *The Believer*, *Ploughshares*, *Boston Review*, and elsewhere. He is an Assistant Professor at Wheaton College in Massachusetts.



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