

Between The Covers

By Gerald J. Gargiulo

Before the final sunset of the Roman Empire, a philosopher put pen to parchment and wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*. His name was Boethius. Preparing for execution, having been wrongly accused of treason, he found strength in quiet reflection and awareness. Facing the death of life, in all its many masks, is a human task and we need reflection and awareness to carry it out well. William Kistler's new book of poems can help.

Kistler, who has lived on the East End and written about it, has published his third volume, a text of power and quiet beauty. His interests and concerns flow from the need to find love, to the embodiment of love in social equity, to the inevitability of life's complexity and the puzzlement as to who we are.

Kistler is, however, a difficult poet to excerpt. His poems have a length of character, and his metaphors fit the context of his thoughts as neatly as a stone mason completes a garden wall — magnificent in its entirety. I will steal a few lines anyway to let you know what awaits you. Speaking of his brother, he writes:

*His face was sad, as if it had
been dipped
in too much understanding . . .*

Or note the similarity, in the following lines, to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* with its wistful yet incisive observations.

*. . . And When
I have lived through the last of
them [facts]
there is still this mask which
walks on,
remembers itself first as my
face.*

As we gaze into a mirror do we always know who it is who looks back at us? Who it is that others see? In a poem titled "Lines Written On A Park Bench," there is a march of insights, as it were, written in quite ordinary imagery yet transcending mere description in its

encounter with what America can be and, more sadly, too frequently is, in the violence it generates.

*I have lived, thought somewhat
more perhaps
than some of these others who
go on
telling me I should stop ques-
tioning,
embrace the privilege of
America, while I
continue to feel I am being
pulled through
mirrors of truth and illusion . . .*

This is a book for anyone who has wondered about truth and illusion. One need not be a master of literature to run with Kistler's words. He writes of his children's drug addictions, of loves found and remembered, and if should you want a short course in Zen mind, Kistler's poem "Might Market, Taipei" is, in 21 stanzas, one of the best sources I have read. Reflect, for just for a moment, on the following:

*We are not as we believe, free
and independent,
people and events are the field
which shapes
the steps we think we sepa-
rately take.
What then does this mind have
left to recognize
as itself?*

This is Zen for anyone who has grappled with life and wondered what it was all about. If you wonder what it's all about, get *Poems Of The Known World*. It helps to know that someone is walking ahead of us, clearing the way, crafting his thought so well that you may be seduced into thinking that this poet is merely giving expression to your inner thoughts — so well has Kistler given form to our common human voice.

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