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*Spirit Bone* by Gino Sky, and *The Rat Lady at the Company Dump* by William Studebaker (review)

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Throughout, the imagery of the poems is in keeping with the universal initiation myths which drive the plot. Fanning uses his language deftly. He pulls all the stops of linguistic virtuosity, creating aesthetically satisfying and complete connections. The metaphors are so rich in allusion that an occasional restriction might have been of benefit. Youth wins out over artifice at every turn. Fanning explores the full range of humor from sardonic smiles to deep and liberating laughter.

I read the title as a composite allusion to John Donne and Ernest Hemingway. Fanning's *persona* is indeed an island, but instead of isolating himself he defines the island through connections, demonstrating his ability to reach out from his world. He shares Robert Jordan's recklessness and tempers it with tenderness. This is a satisfying book that should make us look for more.

THOMAS AUSTENFELD

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*Spirit Bone*. By Gino Sky. (Boise, Idaho: Limberlost Press, 1991. 48 pages, \$10.00.)

*The Rat Lady at the Company Dump*. By William Studebaker. (Boise, Idaho: Limberlost Press, 1990. 36 pages, \$9.95.)

Limberlost Press has demonstrated a heightened respect for poetry in both these collections, each letterpressed on textured bond with illustrated covers befitting substance.

Gino Sky's collection of twenty-two poems, *Spirit Bone*, throbs with wild diversity, with an intuition cultivated from his native background, but bred cross-ways with 20th-century experience. His powers of observation are incisive and enlightening, his meanings leap-frog conventional logic—but work simply and fully because his sense of wholeness with the earth is congruent throughout. I marvel most at his powerful expression with few words, yet maintaining an ethereal air of detachment. Each piece is a taste, but the sequitur is solid:

Sent to steal  
fire  
from the heavens,  
you contracted out  
your assignment  
to the bad breath  
of constipated angels  
and returned  
with large burlap  
bags  
of western law.  
(Coyote Fats)

His detachment is joyous—chuckling accounts from the trickster, himself—yet overflows with undeniable environmental truths; a refreshing read in light of present pulpit thumping and emotional fanaticism. Those outdoor types who depend on Nature's soundness for daily survival will treasure "Concho Bluff"; those who seek productivity beyond political and environmental polarity will recite "Lessons from the War"; those ruralites who've contemplated the flaws of conventional education will return to "The Road." "The Storyteller" is an eulogy for all dammed rivers and my favorite, "Dream Shirt," idealizes the wild state of existence:

Genetic ghosts  
dance  
molecules in the  
spheres

Outer  
and inner space  
of course  
I trade off  
and leave  
no tracks

Wapiti,  
strato cumulus,  
buffalo grass and  
redwing  
blackbird.

As diverse as the West itself, this fresh perspective has value and purpose with varied meanings in both time and culture. Falling somewhere between legends, mysticism, and holistic truth, this handsome collection is a solid investment for the head *and* heart.

If the function of western poetry is to blaze trails, Studebaker's *The Rat Lady at the Company Dump* marks an underground career in the mines as one to avoid. The stale, dead air hangs in half this work with only the poet's introspective light to sustain the reader through his black, claustrophobic labors within the bowels of the earth.

Only the head sends back messages:  
water, rock, air, and colors I can't see.  
Like a person who lives alone  
I mine shadows for illumination.

(Mining at Night)

Studebaker's craft is solid, but this metaphor hesitates short of any real revelations except that in this everpresent blackness where a man may die by many means, perhaps none but *real* tunnel vision is possible. Even so, I wished for more.

The above-ground half defines the characters and the landscapes in sunlight. "Holing Through" awakens to the voices outside, and I hear the muse:

That's how I learned voices were real  
that they can pull me sideways  
through no hole at all.

"Working the Surface," "In the Dry," and "Norma Jean" possess an ironic humor consistent with the working western culture—common men and women bigger than life, an unspoken camaraderie of sweat and fear which exudes truth. The title poem may be the masterpiece, ultimately bringing the scavengers of light and dark together, with the poet, to survive at the Company Dump.

The rat, hit in the head, jumps  
straight up out of its shadow  
as if it wanted a larger bite  
of life than it had been given.

Most imagery leaves an empty pit in the belly. There is a sense of hopelessness, a heavy, almost socialistic grayness, which Limberlost Press has assuaged in a handsome, colorful package. Each poem, though, offers more than what was taken out of the ground, indeed a part of the changing attitudes in the West.

JOHN C. DOFFLEMYER

*Dry Creek Press*

*Simple Versions of Disaster.* By Jerry Bradley. (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1991. 124 pages, \$9.95.)

The title has to be ironic. There is nothing simple about the poetry of Jerry Bradley. A reader cannot sit back and read poem after poem in the safe expectation that they will be similar—just as the narrators and subjects of his poems cannot be safe from unexpected disasters, one such as represented by the bee pictured on the cover. There is no one simple theme for the poems in this collection, but in many of them, the narrator expresses views similar to those expressed in the final stanza of "Electricity":

In the savagery of intricate circuits  
we all begin our nests, extinction