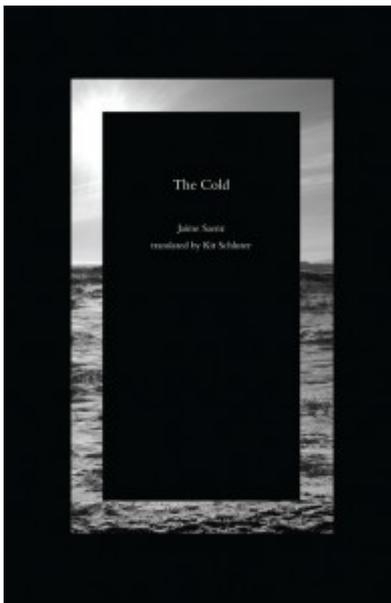


Small Reviews of Small Books

written by M Kitchell | June 15, 2015



The continuing adventures of engagement with small books. As in [the first installment](#), I mentioned I carry just as much interest in “zines” as something determinedly named a “chapbook” and as such made it a point to discuss two books closer to “zines” than anything else this time around.



The Cold – Jaime Saenz

Trs. by Kit Schluter

[Poor Claudia](#)

It is to my discredit that I had not formerly heard of Saenz—for reading the brief bio included at the end of this thin book, my interest is certainly piqued. But the centerpiece here, of this brief and good looking book, is a poem in 10 parts, *The Cold*. Through its ten movements, the poem addresses the cold, how at first the cold brings comfort before introducing loneliness, perhaps, and an unnamed “you,” which, through the variable way that pronouns work, could stand in for the reader herself, a singled out Other that Saenz is perhaps referring specifically to (a lover, a friend), or perhaps the “you” is Saenz’s “I” itself, in a circuitous loop of direct address. This use of pronouns is further explored in the afterword.

Schluter’s afterword, diverging from the usual form of a translator speaking

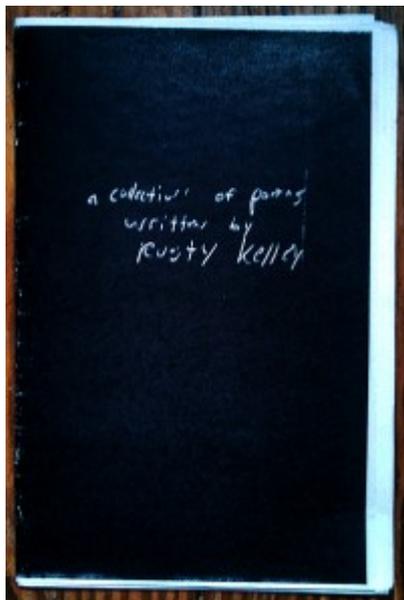
to us directly of the impossibility of “true” translation, does something radical: it addresses the text from the point of view of a reader. In so doing, Schluter manages to engage with the process of translation in a way that *reveals* the text instead of operating as a sort of smokescreen for what is actually occurring: for what is translation, really, if not a very close reading? While there have been more literary projects that explore this idea (for instance, Christian Hawkey’s *Ventrakl*), to see this addressed in an essay following the text it speaks of is something of a breath of fresh air.



Yr Lad, Bob – Sara Peck

[Persistent Editions](#)

Flipping through this book fails to reveal what it really is, and while I perhaps question the fact that the introduction (by Lisa Fishman) is necessary to really “understand” the poems (for shouldn’t the art stand alone?) knowing that this book is ostensibly reading-journal-as-poetry (or perhaps poetry-as-reading-journal?) makes it far more enjoyable. While I’ve never been one for American poets of the 40s and 50s (and 60s? Creeley, Duncan, Levertov, HD), I found much of interest in reading Peck’s readings of said poets. Moments of epiphany (or some sort of formal aesthetic approximation) end up enacting a sort of affective epiphany: there’s a joy present that the reader herself can experience both at a zero-degree and in empathy with Peck as poet. A fascinating book.



A Collection of Poems Written by Rusty Kelly – Rusty

Kelly

[Breathing Problem Productions](#)

Of the zines I've seen from Breathing Problem Productions, I'm always into the aesthetic decisions made, where whatever I'm looking at is clearly assembled more on a photocopier than on a computer. Functionally, these aesthetics provide a sort of "aura" in their own capacity, removing the book from the mass-production of clean and minimal objects—the book abounds with toner rub, edges that would normally be invisible, slight skewing: the zine, the book, exists in a state of disarray.

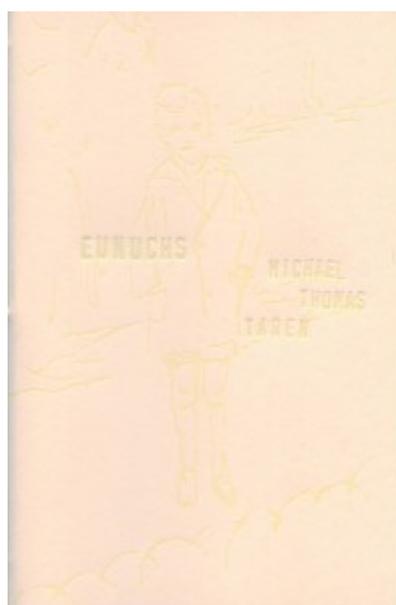
And, the disarray that the book itself presents is carried on in the content. The poems of the title read like spam comments on porno sites, each title being a variation on a theme of smut, perhaps the mad ruse of an email that has a product to sell but you can't figure out what that product is. Words are distorted, letters shifted, as if the poems were typed up while wasted and never corrected. Sometimes meaning can be discerned (and often here it is generally further spam-smut), other times the distortion is so hyper-present that any signified meaning is never present in the first place. Enjoyable, at times funny. Above all, exists in a state of refusal.



How I Got Over My Big Bad Feelings – Gina Abelkop

Self-Published

This is zine-as-personal essay, and there's a beautiful dichotomy present between the tiny hearts sprawled around the border of each page and the content of the personal essay, in which Gina obliquely addresses, as the title announces, getting over her "big bad feelings." While this is somewhat opaque, not being fully informed of what exactly these "big bad feelings" are (though there are references at points throughout the short text), the essay is still compulsively readable and beautifully written, with an air of repetition throughout, lulling like a hypnotist distracting away from pain. The zine also carries beautiful polaroids reproduced in full-color, a diaryesque confessions written in what looks like glitter pen over a pages of a book called "Neighbors Wives" accompanied by cheesecake pinups. A joy of a zine!



Eunuchs – Michael Thomas Taren

[Ugly Duckling Presse](#)

I met Michael Thomas Taren in silence, arriving to a high-desert home in New

Mexico, courtesy of Bett William's generosity and Ariana Reines's planning. We had spoken through email, in fact, before each of our arrivals in New Mexico, both Michael and I had lived in San Francisco. Before this trip, we hadn't managed to connect.

The MTT I got to know over the next few days was a sort of enigmatic trickster who, I soon realized, wrote extremely beautiful poetry. As such, I was very excited when I heard about this book's release and, despite a strict rule at the moment to not buy more books while already owning so many I haven't read, immediately placed my order through Ugly Duckling's website.

The thing about Michael Thomas Taren, which I had an impression of before, but which found itself utterly confirmed in my reading of this book, is that Taren is a poet in a way that seems very rare to me: a poet in a way that I will never be, a poet in a way that most of those who self-identify as poets will never be. His works carries a gravitas that reminds one, at times, of a sort of fin-de-siecle attitude, a desperate insistence on the value of poetry: in paying attention to his mediated existence with Lord Purdey Kreiden, evidenced on their collective tumblr [1thousandand101001nights](#), one can imagine a contemporary Rimbaud and Verlaine, only inhabiting a constantly shifting gender identity that refuses to settle, bearing witness to the 20th century and insisting that while everything is terrible small bits of beauty can be found within a nomadic terror.

The poems are, perhaps, difficult, but they reconfigure expectations in beautiful ways, draw astonishing turns of phrase when discussing the most base materials (the poem "LORD" makes repeated references to "mountains of cum"). This difficultly reconfigures our sensorial expectations of poetry being published in 2015, and for this I am grateful.