



Usher: Poems

B.H. Fairchild

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Employing dramatic monologues, among other forms, *Usher* embraces a range of subject matter and modes, from the elegiac to the comic. At its heart, however, is the long poem “Trilogy,” consisting of three interrelated dramatic monologues spoken by a circus performer, a theological student and part-time usher, and Hart Crane.

Usher: Poems Details

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From Reader Review Usher: Poems for online ebook

Al says

Maybe the best yet from one of our very best poets.

Craig says

I really have to read this one again to truly give it a fair shake.

I liked it. A lot. But on initial reading, I didn't feel an emotional attachment as strongly as I usually do to this poet. Regardless, it is still a great collection by a poet I feel that everyone should absolutely read.

David Allen says

Anyone who can base a serious poem on a 1950s B-movie like "The Creature From the Black Lagoon" has got it goin' on. Another fine collection by Fairchild, full of insight, despair and grace.

Matthew Miller says

National Poetry Month affords me the opportunity to see and hear about poetry in places I normally don't. Our local public library has a decent collection of poetry, I've picked up Thomas Lux and Anna Kamienska from their shelves along with the expected classics and poet laureates. But this month they set up a display in honor of the "holiday," and *Usher* caught my eye with it's beautiful cover image.

When I picked it up, I was pleased to see it was by B.H. Fairchild. Though I've not read any of his previous work, I was aware of him through Image Journal. I had been excited to pick up some of his work and find out what it was like.

And what was it like? Well, I think this quote from "Freida Pushnik," one of the opening poems about the Armless, Legless Wonder who toured with Ripley's Believe It or Not.

"So here I am. The crowd
leaks in - halting, unsure, a bit like mourners
at a funeral but without the grief..."

These poems halted me, left me unsure, head swimming in their *strangeness*. There's the Armless, Legless Wonder, the usher at a local theater who doubles as a seminary student, college kids using Corona's to ponder mathematics and God, barbers, crying piano players in Nordstroms, Hart Crane, working men, classic movies, bank tellers, babies being breastfed in convenience stores... on and on and on. And the strangeness comes from the fact that so many of these poems are not me.

I just finished Paul Mariani's *The Great Wheel*, and I found his poems to be very close to my own experience. These were far removed, and thick with people, places, and things I don't really know. The Bronx, the dust bowl of Kansas, even classic movies like *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Country Girl* that I've never seen. On my first read of these poems, I found them "too intelligent," with too many allusions to things that ordinary people don't know.

But as I began to reread, new levels opened to me. There are many levels of entrance into these poems, just perhaps not as the protagonist. In "Freida Pushnik," the Armless, Legless Wonder ponders 3 visitors that came to her during her time, to see her strangeness. I found myself in one of them. And I found lines that were "Double True," like this one from "The Beauty of Abandoned Towns":

"But in this country vocations are exploited. Ask the public school teachers."

And in the same poem, strains of my own theology even starting coming through:

"It goes back to the oikos, the Greek family farm. Some ethic, some code of honor, kept them small. Big was vulgar, immoral..."

This is why we reread poems, I guess, because they become deeper and more personal with time. And with B.H. Fairchild, there are a maximum of images to contemplate. Perhaps, like Freida Pushnik's 3 visitors, we will either see ourselves there, identify with another and leave, or maybe we will read as if we truly wish to know these others, "as if, someday, (we) might return."

Christin says

An empathetic depiction of the political and economic decline of Kansas, as it never quite recovered from the blighting of the dust bowl and continued to grind itself into obsolescence as family farms were sold out to big farms. The language itself didn't sing for me as much as it usually does when reading Fairchild, but worth reading if you care at all about the state of the Midwest.

martha says

Full of different sections and voices: Kansas workmen and house wives, Brooklyn movie ushers, sideshow freaks, Maria Rasputin, Hart Crane. Having the character in the last poem mention the character of the first poem was an awesome easter egg for having read the whole thing. These two bits are both from a section written in the voice of a fictional character, Roy Eldridge Garcia (which is called a heteronym, apparently):

from Working Men in Their Sunday Clothes
One evening driving Johnson Road he looked at
the oil refinery in heavy wnos, columns of pale smoke lifting
into the night sky porous and quick with stars, and thought
it beautiful. Out hunting one day, the three of them saw a
hawk lurch suddenly in mid-flight and fall helplessly to earth.
They think of their lives as long highways tapering away, then
disappearing into the sandhills. It is Sunday. God for them is a

carpenter with bruised fingernails.

(I found this one in a lit journal and liked it so much I tracked down this whole book, which involved multiple library systems and minor fraud.)

The Deer

B.H. Fairchild

Amid the note cards and long, yellow legal pads, the late nineteenth-century journals containing poems by Swinburne or Rossetti or Lionel Johnson, the Yeats edition of Blake with its faded green cover and beveled edges, I and the other readers in the British Library began to feel an odd presence. We lifted our eyes in unison to observe the two small deer that had entered the room so quietly, so very discreetly, the music of their entering suspended above us, inaudible, but there, truly, as the deer were there. They paused, we could hear their breathing, or so it seemed, and no one moved. What could we do, there were deer in the room, and now hundreds of deer reflected in our eyes. The silence was unbearable at first, and the librarian in the linen blouse, her long fingers trembling, began to weep. The deer sensed this and, without seeming to move at all, came closer, licking her elbows, sniffing the soapy fragrance in the well of her neck, staring into her watery eyes. At some point beyond memory we could no longer distinguish her from the deer, it was all stillness anyway, everywhere the silence covered us like a silken net, and the books began to darken and crumble with age. We had all found our place, our eyes were full of deer, and our sadness was without cease.
