



Monolithos: Poems, 1962 and 1982

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Mary says

These hauntingly beautiful poems are like little love stories at their deepest primal level...sparse, eloquent, fleeting. Some notable favourites of mine were: Leaving Monolithos, Divorce (four spare lines that speak volumes), Night after Night and Losing. Unfortunately this book is out of print but I found a copy at my local library. Highly recommended, this material has as much relevance now as it did when first written.

Katie says

It's hard to write a brief poem, especially in a simple-language, narrative style, without it seeming cursory or shallow. I was impressed by the circles of thought some of the early poems in this book took me on, as well as the way the speaker's experiences in Greece and California are layered with Greek mythology (sometimes a title referring to one with a poem about the other). But near the second half of the book, I stopped trusting the voice: it comes off as insensitive toward its subjects, especially, oh how familiar, the women the speaker has been unsatisfied by. It was a disappointing move, then, from the touching, tragic portrait of Orpheus in the moment of losing Eurydice ("County Musician") to the poems at the end which almost all say "love" but don't make you feel it.

Sean A. says

these poems are spare and compact. some are beautiful, some are not that great, but overall a very enjoyable book. as one reviewer pointed out, here is another male poet bitchin about oh the woman that wronged him and the relationships that went bad. yet there's also a lot going on here in other ways.

one gets a sense of something tinged with sadness but also shades of beauty without being too sentimentalizing and overly cliche. the turns of phrase here are also great and that's why we read poetry? isn't it?

Anna says

I thought I had not read this when i came across a list of favorite poems from this book. They are as follows:
island and figs
They call it attempted suicide
Games
Heart skidding
Alba
Pavane
Meaning well
Divorce

Trying to be married

Tracy E. says

4 Stars for the 1982 portion of the book. 3 Stars for the context of 1962. 1962 was to me, a lot of searching in vague, philosophical and sometimes superfluous ways. 1982 was funny and raw, drawing more vividly from everyday, yet unordinary experiences. There is more beauty and simplicity in those observations than the ponderings. In either section, Gilbert has a great command of syntax and a very Tao flow to his writing. I definitely appreciate that in his 1962 poems, even though it wasn't as engaging for me as 1982.

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Brett Francis says

The selections from 1962 were mostly from Views of Jeopardy, and thus I had a similar reaction to them -- that is to say, not as strong an attachment. 1982's Monolithos had more of the Jack Gilbert I had come to love when I first picked up The Great Fires. I still found the balance skewed towards poems I wasn't as interested in compared to number of poems I was, but there were a few gems in the second half of the book.

Robb Todd says

"Right, he thought, remembering about love. Not wanting the responsibility."

Hard to beat that. Gilbert is brilliant and he does beat that and I think I could write nearly the same review for all his books. One of the greatest American poets.

(Read as part of his collected works.)

Michael Mingo says

I'm not a fan of Gilbert's use of sentence fragments; there are far too many for me to feel a rhythm to the verse. But I appreciate the way he weaves in repeated images in the second section of the collection (Linda, nipples, marble, Greece, Pittsburgh). Maybe I'll revisit it some time.

Michael Morris says

Haunting and beautiful poems.

Ryan says

I liked this one:

Alone on Christmas Eve in Japan

Not wanting to lose it all for poetry.
Wanting to live the living. All this year
looking on the graveyard below my apartment.
Holding myself tenderly in this marred body.
Wondering if the quiet I feel is that happiness
wise people speak of, or the modulation
that is acquiescence to death beginning.

Ron Mohring says

Inspired by Jeff Hardin's practice to read a poem every day to his students, I started doing the same a few years ago. Gilbert's poem "The Revolution" is almost always my first choice.

Highlyeccentric says

Oh, this was gorgeous. I loved so many things in this collection: Gilbert's frank and *genuine* love of women; the Yeats Byzantium references; the Orpheus mythology... so many things.

Ryan says

Out of print, but available through most good libraries. This book is one of the finest by a consistently underrated American poet. Written mostly in and much inspired by his time living in Greece, you can almost feel his contradictory sense of peace and relaxation amongst his poems that condemn much of society and offer a frustrated view of the world. Very beautiful poetry.

Lucas Miller says

I was first told about Jack Gilbert by the boyfriend of a girl a dear friend of mine was hopelessly in love with. I think the boyfriend in question was named Quentin. Or Ulysses. Or something. I found a copy of The Great Fires (poems, 1982-1992 a few years later, and have dipped into it many times. Perhaps because it is a volume of selected poems, I can never maintain focus or get very far into the collection per sitting. The eponymous poem is heart wrenching and there are many poems that focus on personal loss and aging and are all of them are great, but this much thinner, early and earlier collection was much more direct and immediate.

Comprised of poems from Gilbert's Yale Younger Poets winning first collection and new poems written twenty years later, Monolithos is obsessed with the environment's resistance to time. One of the descriptions of this collection call Gilbert's verse classical. I agree with this description. There is a directness and concreteness that is very unique, and reminds me of epigraphs. Of lacunae. There are hardly any adjectives. The language is littered with the Mediterranean. Greece, the Greek Isles, Rome, randomly Japan, and Pittsburgh. All of the landscapes are ancient and barren, timeworn. The affects of time are the defining action in Gilbert's work, memory leading to the more distant past. The hopefulness and beginners luck of the 1962 poems are complimented by the wisdom and good humor of the latter poems, dealing largely with the authors divorce and his travels.

Many of these poems barely take up a third of the page, but they resonate there in all that blank space. This solidity is most impressive. It isn't minimal in the way I usually thing of it. I don't hear imagists when I read these poems. It is a much more personal, essentially timeless, and in some fashion ancient narrator who speaks through these tremendous fragments.
