

Jazz does not improvise on sex and gender." Greer's fearless protagonist Lorraine provides the more successful model of "a female subjectivity that can go to the Other." Major's novel takes up the idea of virtuality to undermine our very notion of reality as it is generally rendered by the Eurocentric paradigm. Like nearly all the other novels examined up to this point, *Reflex and Bone Structure* goes a long way in theorizing a more planetary paradigm for postmodernity, but "fails to completely escape the masculine economy."

The chapters lead us to Xam Cartier's *Muse-Echo Blues* (1991) as the book's apotheosis. In Cartier's blues-inspired novel, Hogue finds a triumphant attempt "to give agency to the Other's alterity, with no aspect of human life being denied or objectified." The novel represents a challenge to

Eurocentrism but also imagines a truly plural African American subjectivity that can account for the effects of Eurocentrism in its own formation. Hogue negotiates a wide range of theoretical frameworks throughout his analyses, but his reading of *Muse-Echo Blues* in conversation with Jung's theory of the collective unconscious is especially insightful. Like many of the other case studies, *Muse-Echo Blues* uses the multi-voiced and improvisational structure of jazz music to tell its story. But in what Hogue reads as a unique and self-conscious device, Cartier uses this structure to give voice to the African American collective unconscious, a multitudinous historical voice carved out of "a past that includes all of his human ancestors as well as his prehuman or animal ancestors." Whereas the other writers employ jazz as a cultural form to supplant the unified voice of

the traditional novel with many voices, *Muse-Echo Blues* suggests that each and every voice contains within it this collective chorus. It imagines a truly plural African American subjectivity.

Hogue's close readings are thoughtful and clear. And while I might give some of his novels a little more or a little less credit than he does, the overarching trajectory of the study bears out his claim that postmodernism can work in concert with traditional cultural forms to shape African American narratives that think beyond the white-black binary.

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THE SEASONS

Tyrone Williams

A DAY LIKE TODAY

Barbara Henning
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Over the course of her thirty-plus years of writing, which has resulted in over twenty published chapbooks and books, Barbara Henning has honed her art to a fine polish. Her *ars poetica* has remained consistent and steady, guiding her through decades of personal triumphs and failures, calm and turmoil. Henning's unwavering commitment to narrative, to storytelling, regardless of the form or mode her writing takes, is very much the result of her understanding of herself as a working class woman who grew up poor in Detroit. Regardless of where she has lived (New York—twice—and Tucson), Henning has been writing back to that little girl who lost her mother at an early age, back to the thwarted hopes and dreams of her first marriage. Both of these losses left an indelible stamp on her sensibility. This is hardly a psychoanalytic take on the author's "personality;" I simply want to flesh out some of the enduring concerns of her novels, stories and poems. Even the novel about her time in India, *You, Me and the Insects* (2005), fits neatly into her body of work. In brief, Henning is an expressionist, a traditional storyteller whose main themes are security, comfort and movement. In that sense, the title of her latest collection of poems, *A Day Like Today* (2015), can be taken as both a gesture toward this celebration of the everyday life of a grandmother, woman and New Yorker as well as an affective ethos: the longing for the certainty of cyclical motions and rhythms are consistently disrupted by the natural cycles of day and night through time, which imply a spiral, not a circle.

Henning's recognition of this gap between desire and fact is implied in the organization of these "O'Hara-like I-do-this-I-do-that" poems. She groups the poems according to the four seasons across five sections: winter, spring, summer, fall, winter. Though "winter" poems frame the collection, the second winter section is not a copy or conclusion of the first. Like the insurance company that confuses her with a "Barbra Hennig" billed "\$15,000, a hysterectomy / I never had," ("Before The Noon Hour" in the first section, Winter), the second winter section, which closes the book, is only a mere approximation of the first.

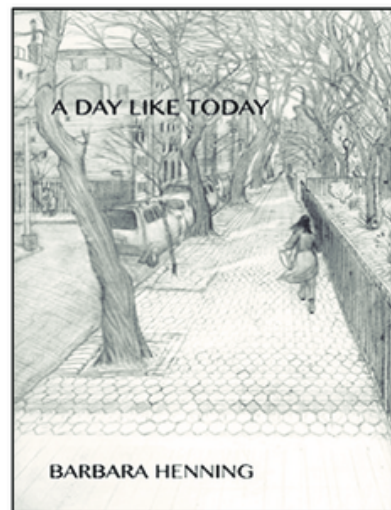
In fact, things are a lot darker as Henning, starting in section four, "Fall," and continuing into the beginning of section five, "Winter," records the after-effects of Hurricane Sandy. For most of *A Day Like Today*, however, the "news" is only one of the many passengers on Henning's bus as it faithfully follows its route through New York. Another way of saying this is that the political, economic, and social upheavals receive the same degree or concentration of attention as our narrator's errands, family visits, health concerns, worries regarding aging and longings for a stable personal relationship. As Henning points out under the Acknowledgments page, these poems are a composite of *New York Times* news columns and her own journal entries throughout 2012. Nevertheless, the resulting composites are more linear than one might imagine, largely because Henning's consistent voice hardly rises above the conversational or the conventions of reportage. Aside from a few puns and other forms of wordplay that serve to link the prosaic and poetic (one poem begins "These socks cost \$10 a pair / and the darned spool has / been in my sewing box for year" and ends "...As Kierkegaard / noted, life is lived forward / but understood backward, / a darn good reason for/ making the rich pay more."), the journal-like journalism tends to level all distinctions, at least in the first three sections. Yet, if Henning's bicycling and walking the same

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routes repeatedly, like a bus, creates an effect of monotony, the leitmotif of "my love" unsettles. Even when the longed-for reunion of lovers occurs, Henning's narrator, however comforted, remains on her emotional toes, alert for the slightest sign of restlessness and conflict.

For all that, the overall tone of these poems is the value of comfort. In one of her least affected, most direct lyrics, Henning writes:

Night after night,
over and over,
pulling up the covers,
turning on the light,
and my first thought
when I get into bed
is how lucky I am
to have this place,
these covers and
to be here right now.



This striking simplicity of the poem seems, to me, to be a perfect accompaniment to Edward Hirsch's lyric poem "Dawn Walk," which concludes:

And as I turn home where
I know you are already awake,
Wandering slowly through the house
Searching for me, I can suddenly
Hear my own footsteps crunching
The simple astonishing news
That we are here,
Yes, we are still here.

In its best moments, *A Day Like Today* achieves this kind of resonance between intimate uncertainty and a distant awe—an appreciation for domestic comforts however chilled by the clamor of the city and, beyond, the world.

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