



Flashpoints

[Barbara Boncek](#)

In her Flashpoints columns, poet Barbara Boncek explores the range of small-press limited-edition books and chapbooks. The [special-order page](#) of our Frigate shop permits our readers to write directly to the publishers of books that are not available through ordinary commercial channels.

— The Editors

- [Dear Dad](#) (Bill Luoma)
- [The Raw Brunettes and Dead Frogs](#) (Lorraine Schein)
- [A House of Corners](#) (Bertha Rogers)
- [Turning Stones](#) (Su Polo)

To order any of the five chapbooks Barbara Boncek reviews in this issue's Flashpoints column, go to [the special-order page](#) of the Frigate shop.

Dear Dad

by Bill Luoma
Kane'ohe, HI: Tinfish, 2000
\$6.00

Dear Dad, is a pocket-sized chapbook by Bill Luoma, who lives in Honolulu and is the author of three previous books: *Works & Days*, *Swoon Rocket*, and *Western Love*. *Dear Dad* is a diarylike collection of brief letters written to Luoma's father, who is struggling with a stroke and impending death. The fifty entries, each beginning with "Dear Dad," tell Luoma's father's story as a series of remembered events, providing intimate details of a life and death.

The first two entries describe Luoma's father's anger at the state of frustrating debilitation in which the stroke has left him. "Your fingernails were thick and long," Luoma says to his bed-ridden father, "and you picked at the straps. I was proud that you were so strong." And again, in the second entry, Luoma writes, "Everyone says you're almost dead. I don't like this about you screaming and skinny in the VA ward."

In the course of the chapbook, the reader learns that Luoma's father worked on a farm, ran track, and fought in World War II. He earned a degree in psychology, and after a series of jobs, was hired by Lockheed, where he worked for thirty years hiring "workers to build nuclear missiles." When Luoma was sixteen, his father divorced his mother, and Luoma moved with him to an apartment where the two of them "used to put drinks away." He thought his father was "cool" when he allowed him and his friends to get high in the house. Yet his father shook him when he thought he was on heroin and threatened one of Luoma's friends with a baseball bat when he flicked a bottle cap on the floor where it would be painful to step on in the morning.

Though hardly a consistent parent, his father provided Luoma with many good memories. Together the two would go to meetings of the Indian Guides—an organization similar to Boy Scouts — where they did crafts and told stories. On Saturdays his father would take him for a haircut. Luoma "can't remember talking. But there was *Penthouse* and *Sports Illustrated* and combs in blue fluid." They would then "browse" at the hardware store. After, the two would go to the a bar called Tao Tao where "you would bring me a coke with a cherry in it."

As his father nears death, Luoma explains to him and to the reader that there will be no funeral, but a celebration conducted by "the reverend Tirza Ericson" at the Radiant Light Center, where his father had married his girlfriend Jenny. She and others will participate and Luoma will read *Dear Dad*. "Outside we will do the balloon ceremony."

In accordance with Buddhist beliefs, Luoma expects his father to enter the state of *bardo*, a forty-nine day period of transition the dead make before reaching the next stage of enlightenment or rebirth. He explains how the burning of the body releases the "peaceful and wrathful deities," so that light and wisdom are ultimately achieved. Preparations are made to launch his father's ashes into space aboard the Taurus expendable space vehicle. When the unit reenters, it will vaporize and appear as a shooting star.

Most entries in *Dear Dad*, Bill Luoma's fourth book, are easy to understand, but some are too elliptical and leave the reader guessing. Even so, Luoma's sensitivity and compassion are evident in the sometimes sparse language he has chosen to describe his subject. The death of a parent is not easy to deal with, but Bill Luoma has succeeded in this fine tribute to and eulogy for his father.

The Raw Brunettes

by Lorraine Schein
Le Grande, OR: Woodcraft of Oregon
36pp., \$6,00

Dead Frogs

by Lorraine Schein
Baltimore, MD: Apathy Press
28 pp., \$5 (might as well add price here)

Lorraine Schein — a New Yorker whose work has appeared in the anthology *Isis Rising* — is a diversely talented writer as well as a *Frigate* contributing editor. Schein's fiction and poetry are featured, respectively, in *The Raw Brunettes* and *Dead Frogs*, two chapbooks that have not received the attention they deserve. *The Raw Brunettes* is a wildly creative short science-fiction novel (seven chapters, each two to three pages) about a group of feminists who try to gain access to other galaxies.

Headquarters for Schein's Raw Brunettes (when they are not in New York) is an asteroid, "a black chunk of rock on the edge of the galaxy," with a long-lashed winking eye for a gate.

The Brunettes' powers come from their magic weapons: handbags, psychic lipstick, black petticoats blocking the moon. "They drink shadows and cast moonlight." Their dreaded hand signal is a cupping of air into a spiral and their chant is:

Burnt hearts of umber
Black hearts of umber
Have the Raw Brunettes
We rend all hearts asunder.

They also "abide by and follow the sacred doctrine of Gynochaotics."

Among Schein's strange and unusual characters is Ms. Feral Darkness, a nuclear scientist who "won the Nobel for being the first to split the quark by amusing it." Leader of the group, she is "fomenting, fomenting always."

Pink Clutter, the weirdest character, is descended from a long line of Raw Brunettes. Because she is an albino, she tints her hair pink and had her corneas chemically stained pink. She thoroughly enjoys sex of all kinds, with men, women, strangers — even an incubus. She has nicknamed her pink clitoris Harry. "Harry and I are staying home tonight, she'd say." She has even tried to seduce Alfalfa Le Fay, a thirteen-year-old Raw Brunette, "a fairy enchantress," with powers inherited from her mother, a recovering witch.

Alfalfa looks and acts like Alfalfa of the Little Rascals. She carries a magic balloon into which she escapes when threatened. Only Alfalfa can float on quiff (probability waves) or "quaff a quiff" — among other things, a sly poke at the funny names for subatomic particles. Because the electrons in Alfalfa's body are more sensitive than those of the other Raw Brunettes, she plays an important role in the great adventure of The Swirlicity (a "giant orgasm").

Calligo and Aquarelle are two other Raw Brunettes. Calligo, the tracker for the so-called Hectic Red adventure, wears a watch with a lock of brunette hair floating in it. "The voodoo lock." She wears black bloomers, red stockings, and black high-top sneakers. Through the cutout circle at her crotch, scented pubic hairs flap in the breeze as she flies through the air.

Aquarelle wears black shoulder-length gloves, lace cuffed, and a sheath with its dagger safely in place. Designated as the Decoder for the Swirlicity adventure, she is overcome by the flow of data pouring into her and, though the Raw Brunettes try to help, she does not survive.

Through their magic the Raw Brunettes are able to manipulate the sky, the sea, and the moon and to bring forth manifestations such as the Queen of Brooklyn and Ellen Jewett, a nineteenth-century prostitute and Raw Brunette from the past.

A first novelette for Lorraine Schein, *The Raw Brunettes* is not for the staid and the starched but for readers who enjoy stretching their imaginations to the limit. The book's mix of magic, science, and sex is beautifully illustrated by Freddie Baer, who provided the cover collage and three collages for the inside pages. Each has a woman at its center with a border of finely detailed objects like clocks, bits of machinery, flowers, and dolls, strongly underlining the idea of a female universe.

Lorraine Schein's poetry chapbook *Dead Frogs* contains thirty very short, mostly very funny poems. Though some are serious, most are light three- or four-line commentaries on everything from life in New York to John Ashbery.

The title poem of the book, "Dead Frogs," reads:

I gave my love a dead frog
To show what he meant to me-
And now I know he really cares
Because he gave me three.

This tongue-in-cheek simplicity contrasts sharply with the poem "John Ashbery" in which she describes the poet as "the nouvelle cuisine of poetry" and "the white noise of the mind."

Included in this collection are three poems titled "Poem." The first of the three reads:

Whenever you feel alienated
Remember God is there—
Watching you on his TV set,

While drinking beer, in his underwear.

When Schein turns more serious, she touches the heart. "Level Five" reaches up and out into the future, for instance. Like the longer poem "Entered Collage," it is one of her best, as is "Kabbala 2," which begins:

The dream
was the color of water.
Now angels
like hurricanes
sensed
but not seen
disturb my morning's weather.

Lorraine Schein's *Raw Brunettes* are "wired" differently from men, who don't understand them. The Schein of *Raw Brunettes* and *Frogs* is wired differently herself — a new and unusual voice, funny and sometimes silly. She has the ability to laugh at life, and, like her Brunettes, seems to be seeking out the secrets of the universe. She does not give her readers dead frogs.

A House of Corners

by Bertha Rogers

Baltimore, MD: Maryland Poetry Review/Three Conditions Press, 2000
24pp., \$6.00

A House of Corners, the most recent chapbook by Bertha Rogers, is a collection of 23 poems on nature, love, and home, a meditation generating a sense of serenity and peace. It was the winner of the Annual Poetry Chapbook Award from the Maryland State Literary Society, an award consisting of \$100 and publication of the chapbook.

Rogers's nature observations are precise and careful. In the poem "Desire," for instance, she writes:

I fall asleep and wake to a yellow frog,
not one inch long crossing the screen behind
the glassed Virgin's eyes...

In "Buck" she pursues a startled deer. Unable to find it, she writes, "I try again; lay myself on the deer's slope..." Even flies cannot escape her scrutiny. In "March Flies" she writes, "Through winter they lived / temperature-stupid, /sluggish as autumn bees."

Gentle love permeates this book by the founding director of Bright Hill Press and the Word Thursdays reading series. That emotion is particularly apparent in the poem "By The Side Of The Road," a story of old intimacy. The last verse reads:

Tonight, they'll attempt, again to be gentle;
bypass truth just enough to cross over,
kindle remembered likeness.

"Out Of The Dream", another love poem, contains the line "I live in a house of corners." In the poem Rogers describes the angled hallways and landings that mirror her life with its "obscured perspective" and "waking inversions."

Writing in free verse, Bertha Rogers uses fresh language and rich phrasing: "The window outlooks the slope," "I wake to the new year's low-rolling

morning," and "The peepers tweak the blue-black cloth of night."

An appreciation of nature and Christian religious feelings go hand-in-hand for Rogers. She makes several references to Mary, Mother of God; Joseph; and Gabriel, as well as to Christmas and Easter Monday. In "From My Room, Christmas Morning," she writes:

The yellow desk dictates a verged space, its legs
trees to the carpet. The chair cradles a cushion.
The clock, small faced, accountable, frets.

In "Meditation," the last poem in this collection, Rogers writes, "Strive for contentment amid clamor." This not only summarizes the poem but Rogers's attitude toward life and toward nature.

Bertha Rogers is founding director of Bright Hill Press/Word Thursdays and the administrator of [the NYSCA Literary Curators' Web Site](#). Birch Brook Press has recently published Rogers's translation of *Beowulf*.

Turning Stones: A Collection Of Poems And Stories

by Su Polo

Self-published. \$5.00

Little escapes the sharp eye of Su Polo, who is co-director of the Saturn Reading Series and edits its tabloid poetry publication. In *Turning Stones* Polo takes the reader into the laundromat, the butcher store, and the pet shop to observe with careful attention the everyday occurrences in these ordinary places.

"Talking to Animals" is a two-paragraph story about a trip to the pet shop where she goes to buy wax worms for her chameleons. While there she pays a visit to the homeless animals and observes the trapped fish. "I wave to the clown fish and he waves back." She blows hello bubbles with her mouth forming an "o."

In "Inconsolable" she remembers accompanying her mother to the butcher store on Second Avenue and Twenty-Seventh Street. Her mother would order bologna "and the butcher would hold a big, fresh slice out over the counter just for me and I could have it right there and it was good." In the paragraph that follows she comments on the fact that the color of bologna is "such a perfect match to Spalding bouncey balls." (*Bouncey* is Polo's spelling. The dictionary spelling is *bouncy*.) Polo also notes that bologna is similar in color to pink pearl erasers and hot water bottles.

"A Lesson in the Laundry" is the story of a poor old man with no money who puts his rain-soaked coat and hat in a still warm dryer hoping to dry them. At first Polo thinks it's disgusting. Some unsuspecting person will place clean clothes in that dryer so she puts a quarter in the machine. Grateful for her kindness, the old man repays her with three gum drops. She returns them "since I can't accept gum drops with pocket dust on them." Undaunted, he tucks pretzels wrapped in Kleenex into her laundry basket and gives her dryer-warm literature from the Franciscan Monks. Not only does the reader learn about kindness and kindness repaid, but Polo also gives us a list of "things you don't put your stuff in the dryer after."

"Building Man" is about an inspection of an old textile mill by a group of artists looking for workable space. The tour is conducted by the building man. "He looked young, in his twenties maybe, but he stood old with a

weary stoop.... He led us down close quartered and cluttered hallways,
littered with boxes of material and industrial parts. Dead bones of the
industrial revolution unburied?" As throughout this chapbook, Polo's keen
eye has missed nothing.

©2000 Frigate: The Transverse Review of Books www.frigatezine.com

All rights reserved on behalf of the authors.

We welcome your comments and suggestions on our site. Please email [<webmaster@frigatezine.com>](mailto:webmaster@frigatezine.com).

Back to [Frigatezine Home Page](#)