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## Twenty Poems by John Haines

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Which brings us to Tom Robbins' main failure. As America slithers further into the post-Altamont, post-Vietnam-Consciousness Seventies, *Another Roadside Attraction* less and less represents the nature or direction of *anyone's* thought. Fewer freaks buy the "love & peace" rap as a solid reality than ever before. Greg Shaw called the year 1972 "the last one for hippies," and he may be right. A genuinely sympathetic audience for this novel might not even exist as a group.

But even if the "real life" followers of the psychedelic philosophy have broken apart, Tom Robbins and his creations have not. The book argues eloquently for its viewpoint by maintaining high narrative energy and consistently entertaining expression—absolutely nothing makes John Paul Ziller mis-mumble an incantation or causes Amanda to bogart that mushroom. At worst I suppose *Another Roadside Attraction* is already nostalgia; but damnit that can be both comforting and exciting under the right circumstances. Somewhere in this country the barbaric American bumpkin lives on, popping pills and reading comic books, filled with inconsistencies and the pioneering spirit. May the Infinite Goof have mercy on his hairy soul.

David Long

## TWENTY POEMS

by John Haines

Unicorn Press (limited edition) 1971

\$6.95

In an excerpt from his notebooks, John Haines talks about *night vision*—a way of seeing by looking just to the side of the true subject, by sensing its mass and movement, "the characteristic gaze of a person who is . . . seeing not with his two eyes but from some point within himself." Even more so than his previous two books (*Winter News*, 1966, and *The Stone Harp*, 1971) *Twenty Poems* demonstrates this night vision. It is a book filled with presences, with images that stir our awareness of kinship and connection in the natural world. In many ways it draws upon the particular strengths of the first two collections: the strong, simple eloquence of the frontiersman in *Winter News*; the more urgent and troubled voice in many of the poems in *The Stone Harp* that forged difficult, at times, radical images. This is a book to be read with a sense of night vision as well. The power of the poems comes at you mysteriously, at the periphery of your consciousness; and likewise, the figure of the poet is nearly invisible, standing to the side of the poems.

These are poems about shaping, or perhaps simply, discovering a life, a place in the natural world—a way of surviving on the strength

of one's prehistoric intuitions, as in the lovely poem, "A Winter Light":

We still go about our lives  
in shadow, pouring the white cup full  
with a hand half in darkness.

Paring potatoes, our heads  
bent over a dream—  
glazed windows through which  
the long, yellow sundown looks.

By candle or firelight  
your face still holds  
a mystery that once  
filled caves with the color  
of unforgettable beasts.

If there is an ambiguity in these lines, it is not in the *voice*, but comes from the discrepancy between our daylight consciousness and the flow of urges that fill our dreams, those we share with the animal and vegetable world.

The values of solitude, silence, self-reliance we've come to associate with Haines' poems, recur in this book, as in "The Hermitage":

No one comes to see me,  
but I hear outside  
the scratching of claws,  
the warm, inquisitive breath . . .

And once in a strange silence  
I felt quite close  
the beating of a human heart.

Or from "Woman":

No one knows that country  
who has not camped  
at the foot of night's glacier.

And like earlier poems, death is a lurking presence in these images, as close to you as your shadow—"the death-angel / with buffeting wings."

Many of these poems reveal the urge to personify natural forces: we find the Frost King; the goshawk that speaks to its prey; and "Winter, the unfinished, the abandoned, / slumped like a mourner / between two weeping candles." These are poems that stem from a feeling for the world's magic and man's capacity to create and repeat myths. As Haines says, again in the notebooks, "The original



way of thought was mythical. . . . The distinctions that developed later between man and beast, between animal and plant, flesh and rock, did not yet exist. Grass was people, and any child today knows this is still true." "The Mushroom Grove" is a fine example of this:

Here the forest people  
died of a sexual longing.

The ground trampled in their passion  
healed into a cemetery,  
with a few flowers  
like frayed parachutes.

Their headstones are umbrellas,  
black and weeping.

There is something I find genuinely satisfying about John Haines' poems. With the exception of his few "political message" poems, they are strong and masculine, in the best sense of these words. There is nothing arbitrary or willed about their images—I never question their urgency. They are even strong enough, at times, to be small or fanciful without being trivial. They speak from the source of our common humanity, yet Haines remains individual, a man at a distance from other men, as in the final poem of the book, "Love Among The Oranges":

In the big house  
by the orange grove,  
fire and drunkenness,  
fierce, monotonous music.

But we were not going to go in;  
there was something else  
in the night, in the wind  
that ruffled our fur

*Gary Thompson*

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I would like to double back a decade. In 1963 New Directions published Alain Bosquet's *Selected Poems* which was the first English translation of this prolific French writer. During the past 30