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On Tess Gallagher and Laura Jensen

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Instructions to the Double

Tess Gallagher

Graywolf Press

Port Townsend, Washington, \$4.00 paperback

Tess Gallagher speaks in her poems with personal, intimate voices. Many of the poems draw you in like a familiar gesture. They make you feel as if you had known this poem well before yet only now are you beginning to see how much deeper than its first warmth this intimacy is, a close friend become a closer friend. Here is a second voice which seems nearly your own, and yet it is capable of teaching, of explaining, of deepening. And it is this voice which haunts and enriches these poems and at times, as in the title poem, surfaces and speaks directly with an amazing power.

Instructions to the Double

So now it's your turn,
little mother of silences, little
father of half-belief. Take up
this face, these daily rounds
with a cabbage under each arm
convincing the multitudes
that a well-made-anything
could save them. Take up
most of all, these hands
trained to an ornate piano
in a house on the other side
of the country.

I'm staying here
without music, without
applause. I'm not going
to wait up for you. Take
your time. Take mine
too. Get into some trouble
I'll have to account for. Walk
into some bars alone
with a slit in your skirt. Let
the men follow you on the street
with their clumsy propositions, their
loud hatreds of this and that. Keep
walking. Keep your head
up. They are calling you—slut, mother,
virgin, whore, daughter, adultress, lover,

mistress, bitch, wife, cunt, harlot,
betrothed, Jezebel, Messalina, Diana,
Bethsheba, Rebecca, Lucretia, Mary,
Magdalena, Ruth, you—Niobe,
woman of the tombs.

Don't stop for anything, not
a caress or a promise. Go
to the temple of the poets, not
the one like a run-down country club,
but the one on fire
with so much it wants
to be done with. Say all the last words
and the first; hello, goodbye, yes,
I, no, please, always, never.

If anyone from the country club
asks if you write poems, say
your name is Lizzie Borden.
Show him your axe, the one
they gave you with a silver
blade, your name engraved there
like a whisper of their own.

If anyone calls you a witch,
burn for him; if anyone calls you
less or more than you are
let him burn for you.

It's a dangerous mission. You
could die out there. You
could live forever.

As usual, Graywolf Press has done a fine job of printing these poems. *Instructions to the Double* is a handsome book. Tess Gallagher's poems deserve such a home. The voices in this book will be with you for a long time. These poems talk back. Visit them.

Rich Ives

Anxiety and Ashes

Laura Jensen

Penumbra Press

Lisbon, Iowa

Cloth over boards, \$17.50, Strathmore wrappers \$8.50

In many of Laura Jensen's poems there is a moving away from the initiating subject which takes us along a trail of accumulating surprises until we have entered the world of the poem. The poet holds a deeper meaning carefully at a considered distance until the poem has established a context for it to emerge from.

Here is a voice with a confidence in the knowledge of suffering, more humane than philosophical.

Tantrum

Nothing likes to pay.
Trees do not like to pay.
Wind beats the flowers
from black branches.
It never hears the cries of 'mine!'
It blows the day apart
and already the past is restless.
Now the night is simultaneously
new and used. In the dark
cats plan their movements,
but slip away when
shouts take passengers
into the terrifying air.
The body takes the throat
like an enemy tower.

At the end of the tunnel
the moon sees me crippled
and the sun sees me horribly deformed.
There has been hysteria
shaking the leaves of the willow.
From far off I hear you
as hail rattles on a board fence,
as the telephone wires
take the snow to be a mountain.

And even in the midst of a strategy of surprises there is subtlety, as in "Out the Door":

Good morning,
you are with the snow in the branches
with a life of beauty, liberty and peril.
Measures of snow will drop off like babies
to a lullaby, branches will toss without wind,
far into the day, into good evening. Then,
at best, you are shadowed not by the planet,
but by a single leaf or a single hair.

Goat hair is coarse, short, close
to the skull, the upholstery of a chair.
You did snap shut your purse at the aviary,
at the carving in an ivory horn, a brittle
price and a brittle beak and a brittle tusk.

Sing around the corner, mornings,
crane around in a gown with perfect stitches.
The birds are invisible, in another shell, and
a waterfall beats with a heart's obligation.
If there is anything to willingly care for,
it is the candle in the hand of the gown,
buoyant and stubborn in a starless passageway,
something never overcome as it would overcome.

The risk Laura Jensen takes is that her surprises can be bewildering rather than revealing, but the individual accomplishment of her successful poems makes this a risk well worth taking.

Rich Ives

The Private Life

Lisel Mueller

Louisiana State University Press

Baton Rouge \$3.50 paperback

Lisel Mueller's truths are not the stuff of surrealism, but simply of a life. It is a life not without its own luck, as acknowledged in "Alive Together": "Speaking of marvels, I am alive/ together with you, when I might have been/ alive with anyone under the sun."

Balanced against such private affirmations are public intrusions, as in "Untitled", with its unexpected turn: "Don't ask me what/ switch in my mind flashed on,/ unbidden, the Algerian girl/ who had a