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On Samuel Green

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and not Holthaus who had written so many of these lines and stanzas. Holthaus is, in the words of Ezra Pound, that "rare carpenter who not only can put boards together, but who knows seasoned wood from green."

Robert Hedin

Gillnets

Samuel Green
Cold Mountain Press,
4705 Sinclair Ave.,
Austin, Texas 78756
\$4 paper

It is a time
for binding, for mending, for songs
with rhythms of a healing man's fingers.
(from "Calling for a Song on the Mountain")

There's much to be thankful for in this first book by Samuel Green. In it you hear a sure, convincing voice, you witness the mapping out of a clear vision and its possibilities. The poems are written with care, with an obvious love for the sound of words. How many poets have I read this year who treat language like some parents slap their kids around in laundromats? Too many. There's nothing easy or dashed off in any of Green's poems that I can see. All have the feeling of having been nurtured.

WHERE THE LINES CROSS, the first of three sections, is concerned with geographic/psychic locations. Poems are set in Tahiti, Antarctica, the Skagit Valley, aboard ship off the coast of Viet Nam, Thailand, and a hospital bed in Seattle.

Water is the book's motif: ponds, lakes, creeks, rivers and oceans figure in half the twenty-eight poems in *Gillnets*. So the world is seen as fluid and unstable. Only the reality of experience is given much credence, as though memory was its own locale. The speaker in this

last stanza of the section's title poem is navigating by stars, alone on the flying bridge:

I set the rules on the compass rose,
walk them across the chart
over Australia, over islands unnamed,
over miles of blank ocean,
draw my lines. In that delicate asterisk,
where the lines cross
in this slow breath of dawn
I can tap my finger, thinking

There I am

even as I move on.

It's a marvelous description of disconnectedness. At the same time there's the security that your life has at least some direction. The compass lines prove it, that you are, or were, somewhere, like the strange tracks atomic particles leave behind that validate their existence. The poems in *Gillnets* are tracks left behind, locations verified by the lines of the mind's compass.

In the second section, COMING OUT IN SONG, the radius tightens, the poems are more centrally located, closer to home literally and spiritually. Poems about family, the past, angers, wounds. And healing. Which becomes one of Green's preoccupations, seeing the poem as a metaphor for the process of healing.

In the last section, GILLNETS, the poems go back out into the world, which now seems more like home, natural and mysterious. "Spearing Salmon in the Wynoochee River" is about relearning old hunting skills, about knowing how to 'see': "The third stab I remember refraction,/ catch the king in the middle of his broad belly/ and pin him to the gravel." In "Eagle Rock at Rattlesnake Creek," the speaker marvels at the uncanny architectures of stone. Where the land has been raped by men, as in "Hiking a Clearcut Near Raymond After a Rain," even here are the small but unmistakable evidences of a world that wants to heal itself: "Clean, the broad leaves of new salal,/ huckleberry, Oregon grape."

One poem I find intriguing is "Death Song for a Murdered Friend," a luminous elegy about a ghastly and sadistic crime. At first I wondered if the lyrical delicacy of the poem didn't soften the brutality of the event:

He rolls in the channel's middle,
rolls and lists. Cattle grazing
at the bank's edge dip their heavy heads
for salt, roll large eyes
and watch him float past.

Then I remembered the sea-change in Ariel's song, the transformations brought on by death, and my doubts became immaterial. In fact, the horror of the murder is actually heightened by the poem's gentle music and careful descriptions so that now I can't get that awful violence out of my mind. Which is what an elegy is supposed to do, of course. Make us feel the death and remember it as though the subject was an intimate friend. A news article of a murder does exactly the opposite: three minutes after you read it you've forgotten the whole thing, never really felt it to begin with.

"Gillnets," the last poem, describes the endless ritual of repairing nets, another lovely metaphor for the process of making things whole: "The needle weaves in and out,/ in and out, square knots mending/ the pattern again and again, like a refrain." Here is the moving last stanza of that poem:

If you are so intent
coffee grows cold beside you,
your back glows red in the sun,
it is only that you can't bear
the thought, heavy as sinkers,
of anything so lovely as a salmon
getting past you, slipping through again.

In any case, Samuel Green's *Gillnets* reinforces my belief that there are still *many* people who can make beautiful things with words, that "Such fusions are possibilities," (from "Letter to Sam Hamill").

Edward Harkness