

Fall 1978

## On Quinton Duval

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### Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Thomas (1978) "On Quinton Duval," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 11 , Article 39.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss11/39>

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*Guerilla Letters*  
Quinton Duval  
Quarterly West Press  
Salt Lake City  
\$2.00, paper

Quinton Duval's new chapbook, *Guerilla Letters*, is brief but durable. The thirteen one-page poems are terse, straightforward and honest. They embody a real experience, an experience of words, images. Then, somehow, they go further. From page to page, the reader knows with increasing assurance that a lively imagination will surface again and again, each time with surprises that turn out to be both marvelous and right.

A poet must begin somewhere, and Duval has the good sense to begin with himself. "The Song of the Wagon Driver" is perhaps the most lyrical and "telling" poem in the chapbook:

These thoughts are here to keep the darkness  
along the road away. The slim road that unrolls  
like a soiled bandage to the end.

When it becomes stones we can begin to soften.  
We can begin to sing out loud instead of inside us.  
The horse's song . . . he knows what he means.  
The driver's song is what he decides it should be  
at the moment he sings.

I usually sing about my wife in her room  
waiting for the present in my pocket.  
About my son in bed, dreaming he hears us  
in our peculiar bedroom chorus. About god,  
who believes he must be in my song or  
it won't be any good.

This reflective, soft, but tough, poetry comes across. We know the poet is reached. We know that his thrust is toward the soul, the timeless. The poem is deeply personal, yet accessible. It involves you, me, and clearly Quinton Duval.

Perhaps what moves best is Duval's tenacity in being so straight, so clear, so true—with a complete lack of petulance. He sets things down plainly and decisively. His images are highly imaginative, but they are carefully chosen and are appropriate to the poem, to what he wants to reveal. Duval uses common, everyday words. The images are generally of the most natural kind: bird and sea and stone. The

landscapes are as spare as the words.

Midstream, in “The River of Birds”, we realize that the poems become even lonelier and more imaginative—a man talking to himself always, trying to make sense, if only to himself:

That's our guide. I'm sorry to tell you  
he is dead now. Shot in the heart.  
He wasn't so lucky as I have been.  
On the Mountain we find bananas and  
we have a good supply of coffee and flour.  
My boots are wearing thin but I have been  
promised the next pair we find.

Duval creates a new imaginative experience, a new world in which our senses are seized with terrible and yet wonderful ideas. The boots of the dead become an important, even vital, matter to the living. The tropics, a strange and beautiful fantasy in themselves, nevertheless become the setting for harsh reality. Again, Duval brings us into terms with this reality in “Angels of the Sun”:

Reality! I want these things: I want my woman, one.  
No . . . first a roof over my head and my mouth full  
of food or love . . . then my wife. My guitar,  
my lover, my friends . . . Two . . .

It's impossible. I stand here pissing air  
into the dust. The months are like the people  
we bury, dragging their feet all the way.

Duval is intrigued with the sound and shape of words. He never forgets that the poem should be written for the ear as well as the eye. Though for me, “The Song of The Wagon Driver”, has the most beautiful music in the volume, there are other instances worth citing. Sometimes the rhythm becomes staccato as in “I Point Out A Bird”:

This bird I've seen before walking out  
of the forest with his head down. Do you remember?  
Riding a hot train, guns held over the head  
to make more room. Hiding in a cart under a layer  
of straw, like a bottle of wine and quite as fragile.  
Coming home to an invisible town and  
a wife made of clear air and smoke.

“The Stone Bridge”, arrives appropriately enough at the halfway point of the volume. In addition to the melody, there is wit, modest wisdom, and an abundance of sheer poetic pleasure:

You will laugh, I hope, when I tell you  
we had to blow the damn thing up.  
Naturally, I couldn't help thinking  
it was our love flying in every direction  
like urgent stone birds.

Of course, I'm using this incident.  
The fact your letters grow thinner (like me)  
isn't an influence. Perhaps you feel  
differently now I am gone.  
The durability of hot lead disturbs you  
too much. You already know my shallow grave.

Admittedly, this poetry is pointed and painful. Duval has extraordinary descriptive powers; it is a correctness and accuracy that leads the reader to believe that Duval is genuinely concerned. In “Just Waking Up” he spells out this concern:

I will tell you this: I am afraid I will  
never get to change something before  
I am changed myself.

*Thomas Mitchell*