

Fall 1979

## Bruce Weigl, *A Romance*

Thomas Mitchell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Thomas (1979) "Bruce Weigl, *A Romance*," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 13 , Article 42.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss13/42>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

*A Romance*

Bruce Weigl

University of Pittsburgh Press

Pittsburgh, Pa.

\$8.95, cloth

\$3.95, paper

The process of discovery comes naturally to children. I remember stumbling with a flashlight in my grandmother's basement and finding a large cardboard carton filled with smaller boxes. Printed on the front of each box was the picture of an animal, a country scene, or perhaps a copy of a famous painting. I recall vividly an African safari, zebras running toward Kilimanjaro, and the portrait of a mysterious lady dipping her knees into the surf. Inside the boxes were various shapes, everyone different; a strange boot that looked like a small map of Italy, a half moon, the profile of a soldier. It seemed like there was no limit. My imagination took wing. Then, somehow the pieces came together. Each, an integral part of a much larger puzzle that seems as marvelous today. Bruce Weigl's poems strike me this way. The pieces, the images of the poems, are as varied and unique as any jigsaw puzzle. And as unlikely as it seems, the pieces always fit together, the puzzle always comes out right.

Weigl's best poems are musical and linguistically playful. One such poem is "Sailing To Bien Hoa":

In my dream of the hydroplane  
I'm sailing to Bien Hoa  
the shrapnel in my thighs  
like tiny glaciers.  
I remember a flower,  
a kite, a mannikin playing the guitar,  
a yellow fish eating a bird, a truck  
floating in urine, a rat carrying a banjo,  
a fool counting the cards, a monkey praying,  
a procession of whales, and far off  
two children eating rice,  
speaking French—  
I'm sure of the children,  
their damp flutes,  
the long line of their vowels.

Aside from the obvious assonance, consonance, alliteration, you can see the poet's craft where the short a's of "sailing" and "shrapnel" are roughed up against the long a's of "hydroplane" and "glaciers." Other linkages, however, don't work when the poet reaches out of his colloquial range into an alien formalism:

He moved it finally from the locked closet  
to the bedroom  
to the garage again  
where he hung it on the wall  
until I climbed and pulled it down . . .

These lines feel forced and clumsy because the connection is never really made; the words fall short of their intention. They are out of context.

In Bruce Weigl's poems the moon has no more value than the birds. One might suppose that his seemingly haphazard placement of images occurs indiscriminately, but actually there is a purpose, a design—the poet is grappling for a handful of detachment, making an honest attempt to understand the world in the world's terms. Weigl does not attempt interpretation, instead he travels headlong into the realms of imagination, memory.

Weigl's poems are daring, but not fearless. In "The Man Who Made Me Love Him," we sense the poet's willingness to assume the role of a child and receive the world with a vision of wonder that seems reverent, even moral:

All I know about this man  
is that he played the trumpet  
from his bedroom window.  
Evenings we could hear him  
trying to play something  
while we laughed at the din  
and called him names.

I want to sing about this  
but all I know  
is that it was near dark  
so I missed the way home  
and stopped to rest in the churchyard  
where gold carp lolled in the holy pond.

I was seven and the man who played the trumpet  
took me to the roundhouse  
where he said the hobos slept,  
and though I knew the tracks  
and the woods surrounding them,  
I didn't know that secret.

He made me take him into my mouth,  
my face rose and fell with his hips  
and the sun cut through boxcars  
waiting to be emptied.

There's an unmistakable irony in the mocking tone, in the sing-song patter of these lines. We begin to suspect that there is something beneath the playfulness, that the poet is playing with something as *real* as matches, something that will ignite and burn. This is the vehicle (I dare call it naiveté) that leads to discovery, that leads to the poem itself.

*A Romance*, Bruce Weigl's first full length collection of poems, is one of remarkable richness and depth. His poems are powerful, unpredictable, full of tension. Always there is a distinctive voice, notably different from other voices, taking risk after risk, breaking all the rules, combining the sublime with the exotic, the strange with the commonplace.

*Thomas Mitchell*