

Spring 1982

On Rick Newby

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Recommended Citation

McCarter, Lyn (1982) "On Rick Newby," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 18 , Article 44.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss18/44>

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REVIEWS

A Radiant Map of the World

Rick Newby

Arrow Graphics

Missoula, Montana

\$4.95, paper

This compilation of sixteen poems and prose pieces clearly demarcates a world radiant with the poet's fascinations concerning his art, his books and paintings, the western land he lives in, and the women who funnel a fluid, erotic awareness to all of these through him. And they are the poet's fascinations first, curiously coveted by an "I" behind all the poems before readers can take them over to themselves. But Newby doesn't resist the reader, or use print to revel in himself; instead, he is careful to begin the book with a politic force that arrows his command over poetic language into the reader:

My tongue is a weapon, a tool, a gift.

And certainly, throughout the book, Newby's "tongue" works in the ways in which this line from his opening poem, "Manifesto," decrees it will. Sometimes as a synthesized weapon-tool-gift which marks an experienced and arrived poet, and sometimes separately which shows that Newby's consistency as a poet is young, yet solidly engaged with the craft of poetry.

Among the poems runs a system of recurrent images, reiterated nouns, adjectives and verbs, and a pattern of theme and variation which keeps the reader trying to connect one poem to another. The color white threads through various poems; Gertrude Stein stands as the subject of one poem and appears later in the title poem; there is a

lush strand of nearly identical sexual motion, posturing, and fecundity in several of the poems; and there is the poet's private nationalism for the state of Montana. Connecting them, rather than simply ingesting the poems one by one and allowing them to resound against one another, would be a disservice to the particular ideas and language presented so particularly by the poet here. All the pieces contained in the book constitute "a poem of love"—as Newby ends his title poem—and should be felt through, moved through elementally, with the senses open and prickling.

Otherwise, such sounds in the poetic prose of "Letter to Oregon, From Montana" would be wrongfully lost:

Asleep, the woman smiles and stretches, arranging her limbs. She is composing: a song, a lyric of ecstasy. With her body, her round, Grecian form, she composes the simple verses. They are not to be sung. They will not translate. They must be danced. In a softly glowing bed, at the hour when rain is music.

Newby has been very accurate with his "s" sounds here, never teetering toward sibilance but getting the words to slide over us and bring us along, communicate with us before meaning sets in.

From "Emma Goldman in Montana," Newby shows us how he can forward character and creative history in poem form, still wanting us to *listen* before conjugating meaning from the language:

Bareheaded and portly,
Emma stood on the train platform
and scowled. She had no text
for natural disasters:
nine inches of snow,
a downpour of rain greasing

the iron rails. Chicago
would have to wait.

Only the day before,
she had shouted from the pulpit
of Butte's Unitarian church:
Women, unbind yourselves!
Men, demand a living wage!
And now, in the stuffy car,
the Tacoma baseball team
threw fastballs
past her graying head.

Again the poet writes in a subaural language here in this excerpt from
"Minnie Miller: A Chronicle:"

She whispered the name. *Montana.*
How strange, she thought, to hear the Spanish tongue
in this northern land. And the Bitterroot Range
rose around her—granite walls, snowfields, icy
mountain streams—and she shuddered. Her fingers,
tight on the reins, turned white as the glacial ice.

It would be difficult to ask for a more serious engagement with
subject and language befitting each subject than Newby offers us in
this book. *A Radiant Map of the World* is, I think, a book of
meticulously thought through, well-sustained poetry; and, ad-
mirably, a book of poetry often about Montana which does not
exempt non-natives of the state as readers.

Lyn McCarter