



Poetry

Book Review by Claire Nicolas White
MARCH BOOK
by Jesse Ball
Grove Poetry Series
\$13.00, 104 pp, Paper

The very gifted local poet, Jesse Ball, grew up in Port Jefferson, and then went on to college at Vassar where he studied with the Irish poet Eamon Grennan. He graduated with an MFA in poetry in 2003. He has since worked in publishing and free lance writing. This past spring he gave a reading from his first book of poems, *MARCH BOOK*, proving that Ball is a young poet with a unique voice of his own.

Like the figures in the cover illustration of his book, a Breugel drawing of masked beemen, basket-headed, carrying basketed beehives, Ball remains hooded but stung, as if by bees, by a totally mythical, timeless world.

Ball is anything but a confessional poet. His work is a celebration of the imaginary, fed by a mostly European civilization in which Breugel, "A yellow cap left on the grass," "the parson hid in the pantry," "a single flower hid in a book of riddles," "the painting lost...in a flood in 1740," "my close-fitted suit, my weighted cane, my

powdered forehead," evokes a long history written into a moment.

His is a largely historical imagination, though his style is anything but nostalgic. It is as if this American has an empathy with timeless moments, as in "Diplomacy," in which a sinister ambassador comes

*... to barter at this late hour
where the slightest chicanery, the hint of a fist
is certain death for everyone involved.*

How contemporary, yet how timeless this seems.

"The failure of modernity... is the failure of the machine to act morally," he says ("A Speech").

*In the yellow vault of antiquity, beneath
the cast hollow of pleasant hours
where we have hoped to live our lives*

*a scribe is copying out the March Book.
("Description")*

As if Ball were searching for a place in time to settle, he writes, "Jesse,/ we've come to take you,/ we've come at last to take you where you need to go."

In a way, his imagination is fractured, his poems puzzle, one after the other. Though organized in sections, the poems fly off in all directions, touching on so many moments, thoughts, images, but always with a visionary surprise, through which shines the elusive Jesse Ball.

As Richard Howard states in his introduction, "To observe something is to posit what escapes observation. This is the tension that generates most of Jesse Ball's poems, and it is a fruitful anxiety."

A final section of prose ends with this lyrical envoy:

*...For the air is temperate here where I make my
home, and the dusk is gentle, and when morning comes I
will go walking in long fields while the earth sleeps fitfully,
beneath leaves as opaque, as delicate, as crumbling as my
own memories and the faces around which they which they
pulse and gather.*

In reading *MARCH BOOK*, one discovers a new poet whose elusive company is worth pursuing.

Claire Nicolas White is the author of numerous works of poetry and criticism. Her books include Biography and Other Poems, and Riding at Anchor, a collaboration with artist Stan Brodsky..

Brooklyn Playwrights Collective
meets weekly to workshop plays-in-progress. Contact :
brooklynplayrights@yahoo.com