

READING COLIN SMITH'S MULTIPLE POSES A review by Kevin Killian

It.
 "I." Can. Duh. A
 dork. What's
 worse? A dork
 wannabe. Master
 metaphor? Like clothing
 that always sort of fits.
 You can't predict what I will next
 frightball. Antipasto.

What would you put in your version of another
 Why Not?

Fuck everything . . .
 —Colin Smith, *Multiple Poses* (11)

When this book came to me I treated it [the book] warily. Years ago I had met Colin Smith at the Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver, and liked him enormously first time at bat. Over the years my affection has not dimmed and yet, I was always puzzled, he said he was a poet, others did too, yet why had I seen none of his work? Usually you get to meet the poet after reading the work, and the shock or whatever attendant from the juxtaposition is of a peculiar kind I've come to know well. But here was the book of someone whom I actually knew first. God, I thought, what if it [the book] is awful! Because certainly there have been lovable people in my life who couldn't really write two words in a row.

In San Francisco I brought Colin's book (the "Smith book" I now say to myself) out to the back porch and read at night, under no illumination but the starlight. "Multiple Poses," as in the photosets I used to order of my favorite porn stars in situations I had no access to . . . ("idée fixe Boner Boy etc./ / Police on steroids./ / Stripped down and posed just the way you like them" [39].) "Poses," artificiality clearly foregrounded. "Multiple," to indicate—at least in the lexicon of porn—more than three and possibly more than four. Certainly there's the connotation of the artificial, the plastic, in the title, not surprising perhaps coming from an author who declares himself anti just about everything, including the essentialist; but what about irony, does it just explode like a razor in the sun? If I read enough about Canada, its politics and its local causes do I embrace irony in multiple ways, or would one be more than enough? "We're still that artifice of sincerity, agreed?" WE = CANADIANS? . . . I got so riled up I felt like going to B.C. and cleaning it up with a flame-thrower, the way Kurt Russell cleans up Antarctica in John Carpenter's *The Thing* . . .

It [the association I came to feel, that Colin Smith is like a modern Allen Ginsberg] is stupid but after reading "Indolent Corollaries," one of the longer pieces in *Multiple Poses*, I felt the same thrill of power and inspiration I used to get when I, a kid in the sixties, would read a then-new book by AG, with whom Smith shares a wonderfully peripatetic positioning of angle, the consuming interest in politics, the affirmation of sexuality and the forbidden, and the unwieldy line, half satiric, half aching lyric. Always something coming at you. I remember reading "Plutonium Ode" and "Please Master," and now I'm reading "Indolent Corollaries." [Except that Smith has, well, much more *interest in women* than Ginsberg, whose writing I loved so much except for the, well, it [reading him] was like a blind spot, an alternate universe in which women didn't really exist: I hesitate to call it [blind spot] misogyny.] [Anyhow Smith has gone beyond "correcting" this spot to this other place I also hesitate to name.] But anyway he busts a gut trying to deconstruct the master metaphor that rules our lives both in the social and personal spheres.

I got so self-righteously angry I thought
 my head would host an event
 of prompt criticality!

His exasperation with the state control of sex pleasure reaches epic proportions, over the top rants, and through fuzzy logic takes on a disgust of sexuality itself. If our culture's preoccupation with sexuality weren't so lurid, would there be all these rotten prohibitions against it? The lurid pushes the buttons, we just sit back *behind the button panel*, watch the buttons come in at us. Like being inside a piano perhaps, is, my experience of social life and of the Smith book.

We think women's bodies are luxurious
 —that's why we tax their tampons.

Usually I can take just so much of this "we" stuff before I begin thinking that poetry is just a *violon d'Ingres*, but here it ["we" stuff] comes in big heaps and I'm still happy with it [the syntactic exhortation to share the poet's anger and pleasure]. Certainly Colin has *thought* his way around huge subjects, the way a mosquito will warily circle my head before landing on it [Kevin's head] and the thinking comes through, subliminally, in the things that are not said, the constructions not placed. I don't have to guess what he means, I have only to measure its [that which he writes] impact on me, one hand on my pulses. No, no hand. It [the reading experience of Smith book] just happens. What would I put in *my* version of another Why Not? Sianne Ngai: "'It' points to the *effacement* of the referent (insofar as "it" is what stands in for it, occupying its position), more so than it does to the referent itself." {Ngai, "Raw Matter: A Poetics of Disgust"}. "Are travel books 'vacations' for our poor?"

I still don't know why it [deixis] took me all these years to actually read anything of Smith's, after knowing him so long, and indeed, asking him for his work. Shyness on his part, brashness on mine? Perfectionism on his part? Perhaps he was nervous around me, thought I might steal some of his ideas. Like the one about travel books which I've been saying for years, my dear, years.

I wasn't comfortable penetrating women
until I was happy being penetrated by men.

But what a difference between comfort and happiness! Elsewhere Smith suggests replacing the sexual verb "come" with "arrive." No, I don't agree with that. When I read a book like *Multiple Poses*, my brain cells fill up with wanting, needing more, a fizzy sensation, I want more of this; at the same time, since I can hardly attend to all of its felicity, what's on my plate at the moment, why do I want more? I'm addicted, that's why. I would hardly want more of John Wieners' *Beyond the State Capitol*, but when I'm reading it I do. Colin Smith asks, "Is this the best we can do,/ paint our humanity on a placard and wave so others can see it?" "The problem is not so much what you do, but who you are." "Protect interests, send message." The brain picks up on one, mulches it, vomits it up, switches to another [message], blinks and blanks through a binary series of multiple choices, short-circuits itself then stops and builds instantly from the bottom cell up, each message altered significantly. [Sign-if-I-can't-lie.]

[Hor-semen of the apocalypse.] Early summer 1998 I read Brian Kim Stefans' masterful *Free Space Comix* (Roof Books) and now comes the Smith book to renew my faith in poetry once again. I mean, to redefine poetry for me again, as a level of agitprop heightened to approach the condition of ecstasy. I want more, but I can't *take* more than what I've got.

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