

is not, in itself, an argument against the novel. There is a long history of memorably manipulative characters, from Pechorin and Barry Lyndon to Humbert Humbert and Patrick Bateman. The trouble is that Lerner does not successfully establish Gordon's ironic position in the novel. *Leaving the Atocha Station* is essentially false, suggesting through Lerner's writerly skill the existence of an emergent, mature sensibility while offering nothing in the plot itself to indicate that the narrator could plausibly possess or acquire this sensibility.

Ben Merriman

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Peter O'Leary, *Luminous Epinoia*. New York: The Cultural Society, 2010. 98pp. \$21

Norman Finkelstein, *Inside the Ghost Factory*. East Rockaway, NY: Marsh Hawk Press, 2010. 66pp. \$15

Around the time Peter O'Leary's *Luminous Epinoia* was published, an essay of his called "Apocalypticism: A Way Forward for Poetry" appeared in the pages of this journal. Part memoir, part polemic, part literary appreciation, the essay argued that apocalypse—a sacred expression that can "unbind love from material desire, freeing it to embrace the unknown and the unspeakable"—has been erased from American poetry. In O'Leary's view, neither the old school of the workshop lyric nor the tradition of Language writing supports vatic or visionary poetry. O'Leary's own recent work, along with that of Norman Finkelstein, constitutes a strong argument for the vitality of this project. O'Leary, Finkelstein, and a number of other poets—Pam Rehm, Michael Heller, Harriet Zinnes, and especially Joseph Donahue and Nathaniel Mackey—make formal and conceptual links to this deeply rooted poetic tradition, which extends back through Duncan to Yeats and Blake. In our formally diverse but overwhelmingly secular poetic moment their work represents a true counterculture whose achievement has yet to be fully appreciated.

*Luminous Epinoia* is a book of many things: surreal fables, reflections on sacred architecture, sermons on the meaning of love in a time of war, and the occasional jab at the policies of the Bush administration. But most of all, it is a book concerned with incarnation. Its title comes from the Apocryphon of John, a second century Gnostic gospel, where the "luminous Epinoia" is a heterodox version of Eve, a physical extension of Adam and a helper who will restore to him the full, creative vision of religious experience. O'Leary's book takes a strong influence from the great Catholic theologian and paleontologist

Teilhard de Chardin, who reconciled his scientific and religious beliefs by imagining that the physical universe imperfectly embodies aspects of the divine, and looked at biological evolution as a teleological process bringing us ever closer to a union with God.

O'Leary celebrates science by bringing its specialized language to bear on mystical ideas generally seen as inimical to empirical thought. The poem "As Twilight into Noonday Knowledge Gyres," for example, splices together the language of contemporary astronomy and cosmology with the catalog of types of angels in Dante's *Paradiso*, giving us strange, haunting passages:

Analogies:  
furthest and closest the Seraphim  
like dark matter, of incalculable unknown density,  
not giving off any light, but not absorptive either. As far  
as our equations allow us to see, we still have no image  
for the highest order of angels, clothed in collapsing nanoseconds.

This passage is typical of O'Leary's relentlessly high-toned diction, festooned with theological terms and arcane scientific language. Whole stretches of *Luminous Epinoia* feel as if we've left the Anglo-Saxon parts of English behind to revel in the Latinate. The sometimes arduous effort required to read it suggests the grandest ambitions. This is an attempt to get at the meaning of the world as a manifestation of divine love—"in a somehow holier tongue," as he writes in one poem.

O'Leary reflects on these aspirations in another poem, "To Suffer to Pass Through," which takes biology as its starting point:

#### Evolution's

apex remains grasses and flowers  
chlorophyll converts to life from light. Conduction of this force is a message  
broadcast from the body of God, a biochemical sun  
transpiercing miraculously, glided on modulating  
radiowaves. Less a metaphor than a stopgap, this notion  
permits us crypto-angelic conceptions of how God's love  
radiates.

There's a humility to that last sentence: an admission that the visionary poet offers not prophetic truths so much as expedients. He allows us perspectives from which the world appears in holy aspect, always understood as a mere conception or stopgap in describing a higher truth beyond the poem.

Like O’Leary, Norman Finkelstein looks back to a legacy of Gnostic American poets: his 2010 book of literary criticism, *On Mount Vision: Forms of the Sacred in Contemporary American Poetry*, is the best and most current outline we have of this tradition. Like Duncan, Finkelstein often turns to the serial poem; like Jack Spicer and Armand Schwerner, he combines spiritual impulses with comic gestures. The connection with Schwerner runs particularly deep: Finkelstein emulates Schwerner’s focus on the mediation of spiritual knowledge by oral and literary traditions prone to fragmentation, distortion, decontextualization, and creative revision. Finkelstein’s work reveals the way an unseen world presses into our own experience: in his poetry, revelation is immanent, just beneath the surfaces of things.

The opening poem of Finkelstein’s *Inside the Ghost Factory*, “Instructions for the King,” reads as a list of ancient-sounding prohibitions, or commandments:

You may not cut your hair, but it shall be cut for you by a free man with a bronze knife.

This is a goat, this is a dog, this is an ape: you must not look upon them, and you must forget the names for such creatures.

[...]

You must cover your head when you go outside, for the sun is unworthy, and may not look upon you.

You may not sleep during rainstorms, and if your wife hears thunder, then she is unclean until the new moon.

[...]

None of this may be written down, for it may be forgotten, and it is not to be forgotten.

Some of these commands seem reasonable. Wouldn’t frequent exposure to a free man’s knife keep a king from acting too capriciously? Could head covering prevent the king from appearing too casual in public, and maintain his power-enhancing mystery? Other prohibitions remain obscure. The poem’s final prohibition—the prohibition against the writing down of the prohibitions—has clearly been violated, as the very fact of the book in our hands makes plain. But is this preservation or betrayal? Finkelstein leaves the matter there, letting us ponder the meaning of the translation of tradition from oral culture to print book.

For Finkelstein, the connection of past to present seems to be a matter of correspondences, in the Swedenborgian sense of the word as an analogy between specific things in the physical and spiritual realms. In “Tag, You’re It”—a poem dedicated to Peter O’Leary—Finkelstein writes, “The things above / are as the things below,” an idea he elaborates upon in many other pieces in *Inside the Ghost Factory*, most notably in the title poem. Here, Finkelstein describes our relation to the ghostly inhabitants of the otherworld:

It has been said  
that the living press down upon them, though  
they press down upon us too, until we are

indistinguishable.

There’s an intimate correspondence between the quotidian and the spiritual here. The poem ends with the repeated assertion, “They are hiring allegorists again.” It is not a minor occupation: Dante was an allegorist, after all.

Robert Archambeau

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Jena Osman, *The Network*. Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2010. 115pp. \$17.95

Language economies run parallel to economies of capital—where they chance to intersect is where Jena Osman finds her poetry. In *The Network*, she foregrounds these intersections by interspersing etymological charts with economic histories. “Rather than invent a world,” Osman writes, “I want a different means to understand this one. I follow Cecilia Vicuña’s instruction to use an etymological dictionary: “To enter words in order to see.” What Osman sees is that language marks shifts in culture to reveal inextricable links to capital. After outlining the etymological connections between “paciscere” and both “peace” and “propaganda,” for example, Osman announces, “derivatives include appease and pay.” Locating a critique within the etymology of the words themselves, Osman suggests that forms of life have devolved into exchange value and political spectacle.

Osman is a poetic collator, a creative editor of historical documents. She finds poetry in accidents of history, in the cultural lapsus that an etymological tree reveals. But her creative editing also blurs into poetic writing; like Susan Howe, another poet who has made much of historical singularities, Osman often writes a carefully disguised pastiche. In one poem, she invents a story