

does not produce the plush and idiosyncratic reading that would convince me, and this particular poem—a failed derivative of O’Hara’s “I do this I do that poem”—doesn’t do Warsh any favors (nor do any of the poems featured in the essay). Lenhart treats proximity as an obvious and self-sufficient value: Warsh is close to O’Hara, so Warsh must be important. This is both the hypothesis and, regrettably, the conclusion of Lenhart’s essay.

That *Don’t Ever Get Famous* includes several strong essays and several that deploy this simple antiquarianism points to a deeper problem in contemporary poetry scholarship. It seems disciplinary paradigms discourage criticism that treats poetry in combination with other kinds of writing and arts. If *Don’t Ever Get Famous* is purportedly about “New York Writing after the New York School,” why aren’t there any essays on fiction, philosophy, or literary journalism? If the plan is to “trouble rather than codify assumptions about the stylistic, social, and/or cultural consistency of the works often gathered under the ‘New York School’ rubric,” why do nearly all of the essays focus on experimental poetry? The result of ignoring these questions is an uneven book of essays on poetry, rather than a book that follows the examples of Shaw and Russo, who demonstrate and conceptualize the empirical links between poetry and art during the period.

To be fair, Kane is interested in “correcting the historical record” of “a very specific slice of ‘New York writing.’” But it would have resulted in a better, and probably more influential, product if the handful of fine essays in this collection were joined by equally strong work on other kinds of literary experimentalism. If nothing else, this would have helped achieve the volume’s goal of challenging simplistic assumptions about literary taxonomy. In the end, *Don’t Ever Get Famous* should be applauded for assuming the demanding task of historical recuperation; its best essays will no doubt influence the way readers will approach New York writing after the New York school. Still, I await the collection that is undisciplined by the disciplinary conventions that helped to obscure this “specific slice of ‘New York writing’” in the first place.

David J. Alworth

## §

Laird Hunt, *The Exquisite*. Minneapolis: Coffee House, 2006. 254pp. \$14.95

In the acknowledgements for *The Exquisite*, Laird Hunt is frank about his debt to W.G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*, citing the book as the impetus for his novel about death and bohemian eccentricity in the East Village sometime after 9/11. Hunt imports references from Sebald—in particular, to Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson* and to Sir Thomas Browne’s *Hydriotaphia*—to fashion

his literary thriller. Hunt says he does not want to “do a Sebald” outright—to “truffle pages with visual images, eschew novelistic sleight of hand in favor of quietly patterned and heavily mediated observation and inject the whole with a steady drip of melancholia.” Borrowers, however, often get more than they expect. Consciously or not, Hunt still manages to “do a Sebald” of sorts. The “steady drip of melancholia” follows Sebald’s arcana into *The Exquisite* and clashes with the excess of odd details Hunt deploys.

The novel begins with a botched burglary. Henry, narrator and thief, patiently waits for an East Village eccentric to exit his brownstone. But when Henry arrives he finds the eccentric, Aris Kindt, waiting naked in his unlocked apartment attached to a heart monitor. He has been expecting Henry. Kindt doesn’t explain the body double Henry saw leaving the apartment; instead, he invites the young man to steal whatever he likes from an assortment of artifacts that reflect every era of the city’s history.

As Henry discovers, Aris Kindt is a man with a past, a man with many pasts that don’t quite fit together. One of these pasts connects Kindt to the cadaver in the Rembrandt painting; another has him swimming across Cooperstown’s Lake Otsego to win a large bet. Kindt gains Henry’s trust and soon introduces the young man to a group of fellow eccentrics who perform mock murders on willing and paying victims. Henry becomes a somewhat unwilling accomplice who, after a string of successful performances, finds himself wondering whether he’s committed the genuine deed or not.

While this mock-murder plot unfolds in the past tense, alternating chapters in the present relate Henry’s stay in an increasingly deserted hospital. Tending Henry and quickly becoming the object of his affections is Dr. Tulp (a double of Tulip, the beautiful tattoo artist who appears in the other story). Kindt, now a fellow patient, encourages Henry to smuggle pharmaceuticals out of the hospital. This doubling suggests two separate yet connected realities, and I found myself testing the details of one story against the other. But the past of the mock murders and the present of the hospital do not coalesce; there is no direct line leading from one narrative to the other.

This instability works well in a novel concerned with duality and the difficulty of distinguishing fact and fiction, the living and the dead. It is also characteristic of the “two New Yorks” Henry inhabits, one a place where “your heart is beating” and the other where a “heartbeat is at best a temporary anomaly, a trembling aftershock.” Hunt subtly and swiftly transitions from a scene in which Henry is attacked to the lingering devastation of 9/11: “You left and wandered both alone and in company, walked arm and arm with yourself and with a couple million others, up and down the windy, gleaming streets of the necropolis, New York number two.” In this necropolis mock murder is a sharp metaphor not only for survivor’s guilt but also for our latent desire to experience the veneration accorded to victims of history’s outrages.

So far a Sebald-inspired melancholia fits nicely with this city of the dead and traumatized. Hunt, however, doesn't want to linger in this world. He'd rather pile oddity upon oddity. The critic James Wood has dubbed this narrative strategy "hysterical realism": the tendency to treat a novel as a "perpetual motion machine." Wood faults contemporary novelists such as David Foster Wallace and Zadie Smith for constructing narratives stuffed with oddities and "characterized by a fear of silence." *The Exquisite* fits this bill. Hunt, though, has the added difficulty of making his willed weirdness work with a melancholic tone that promises something more than surface strangeness.

A mock-murder service is not strange enough: the group has to be composed of rejects from a Coney Island sideshow. Two of the fake killers are twins; they're also contortionists who perfectly synchronize their mock murders. Similar details, tossed out one after another, do little more than sit on the surface of the story.

The willed weirdness of *The Exquisite* is a shame because the novel so deftly handles the aftermath of 9/11. *The Rings of Saturn* succeeds because its "quietly patterned and heavily mediated observation" makes the odd and weird feel intimate and familiar. Hunt's novel wants to do something similar, but any intimacy is buried beneath an avalanche of oddities. Like Sebald, Hunt evokes a world in which the relationship between past and present is neither stable nor reducible to a single perspective. But the hysterical realism of *The Exquisite* ends up obscuring exactly what Sebald's work reveals: that part of the contemporary world where the tragedy of yesterday is no longer distinguishable from the tragedy of today.

P. Genesis Durica

## §

Kevin Connolly, *Drift*. Toronto: Anansi, 2005. 85pp. \$13.95

Ten pages into *Drift*, Kevin Connolly's third book of poems, I suddenly thought of these lines from the beginning of Whitman's "Song of Myself":

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,  
I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

Reading the book, I kept going back to these lines, thinking of them as a friendly key to *Drift*. Not that the book requires a key, it's really quite clear and direct—but it seemed like the kind of thing Connolly would encourage, that is, inviting one more guest to the party. No big deal, there's plenty of room and half a crate of booze to go around.

But Whitman doesn't want to drink. He's happy with his buzz, a buzz