

what does the title, “Anniversary,” refer?). Kleinzahler has a well-tuned and well-disciplined ear, a trait that would make him worth reading even were his sense of place less intricate and rich. He combines the poet’s lyric and descriptive functions to imbue locality with meaning.

Where Kleinzahler’s poems stray from the descriptive, the local or the lyrical, they lose force and technical proficiency. There are some notable exceptions, poems like “Green Sees Things in Waves” and “On Johnny’s Time,” poems that excel on their own terms, largely unrelated to those I have been discussing. And some of his more comic and satiric pieces, like “Hyper-Berceuse: 3 A.M.” are entertaining enough. But where he does not blend irony with sincerity, he can be wholly and overweeningly ironic. That kind of poetry, however carefully wrought and clever, is more likely to prove ephemeral.

Jon Geltner

§

Martin Corless-Smith, *Nota*. New York: Fence, 2003. 88pp. \$12
Martin Corless-Smith, *Swallows*. New York: Fence, 2006. 101pp.
\$13

The following is the fourth chapter of an unfolding critical novella on current British Poetry, to be entitled Corroded by Symbolisme: An Anti-Review of Twelve British Poets, Being Also a True Account of Dark and Mysterious Events Surrounding a Famous Poem Supposedly Written by Frank O’Hara. The first three installments appeared in previous issues of this magazine.

So back at The Eagle now, Tim Atkins having left twenty or so minutes past. Well, as I sat there, thinking, meditating on the discomfiting events of the day, I felt a hand, light as a swallow, light upon my shoulder. I turned around to see the strikingly handsome Martin Corless-Smith, in all his well-tuned burlinesses. This was a startlyng coincidence, Tim having just been with me, for Martin is fascinated by Horace, too, and writes about hime, in his two latest bookums, *Nota* and *Swallows*, and of his lost Sabine Villa, Horace being in this way a kind of ghost flutteryng through those airy bookums.

Well, hi there, Martin, I said.

Hello, Kent, he said. May I join you ?

Whay of course, I said, By all means!

Martin had the day before given a rip-roaring readinge with Geraldine Monk, a smashyng success, readinge from his latest bookum, *Swallows*, the successor to his brilliant collection, *Nota*, though I have already mentyoned

these, so it sounds a bit redundante, both done in verie elegant production by Fence.

I didn't know it at the time, of course, for it hadn't happened yete, but about a yeare later I would spend three days with Martin and his companion Taryn in Boise, Idaho, because he would invyete me to read there. On the first night, he and I would drinke at one of the great Basque (for there are more Basques in Boise than anywhere else in the Americas save Uruguay and Argentina) Supper Clubs for many pleasante hours, Martin being, I came to know, somthyng to gay men and straighte women as a recentlye drunk soda-pop bottle is to late-summer bees. And while walking backe to his house, approaching 2 A.M., we would walk for some reason through a lawn sprinkler by the Masonic Temple, and though its strong, erotick spraye missed me, it soakede Martin to the skinum, and so there, in the myddle of downtown Boise, in the low 40s of Idaho fall, Martin tooke off his shirtum.

I offered hime my sweater, but he refused, and so I said, Well then, I am going to take my clothes off too, that's only fayre, and Martin shouted at the top of his voice, I dare you, you lovely mother-fucking hulk of a man! And so I did, though just my sweater and shirtum, not all my clothes, and we walked, bare-chested, our arms over each other's shoulders, all the way back, striking an image that no doubt appeared homo-erotic to all the young BSU bar-fly passerby, but which we both, comfortable as peas in a pod with our sexualtyies, secretlie knew was surely nothing more than a spontaneous homo-social expressione of manley friendship between two thirty-something post-avantum poets, with genetyk gifts of beutifulie slim waistes.

The next morning, Martin and Taryn would take me to breakfaste, where I would suffer a deadly combination of hangover and social anxietie attackum, a combination whose intensitie deepened in rapid dialectical cascadium until I knew myself to be Chubaka, from the movie Star Wars, completely covered in haire, not excludynge my tongue. And though Taryn seemed to be, though graciouslie, a bit weirded out by my extra-terrestrial state, Martin didn't seem to mind a byt: He just talked seamlessly about Heidegger, John Clare, and Levinas, as he went with fork and knife at a blood-filled slab of barely cooked meat under runny eggs with the atavistick gusto of some Neanderthal. But anyway, as I'd said, I had no ideum, as we sat there at The Eagle, that this was going to happen, for how could I, as it hand't yet, and why I am even relating this is not at all clear to me, to tell the truthum, but you know by now, if you've gotten this farum, that this is a very unconventional reviewe.

Kent, said Martin, now in the present, as it were, offering a clink of fresh pints, I'm going to blow this pop-stand and take the train back to London tomorrow and pay a visit to the house of John Keats in Hampstead-Heath. Would you like to come along?

Sure, I'd be delighted to, thanks very much. And we did this the next day, and something very bizarre happened there, which I will tell about shortly (though I've alluded to it previously in my second email to Prynne), after I finish talking about our drink at The Eagle. I said then to Martin (whose thick golden hair, I noted, touched by the Sunne, was brushed backwards like the hair of a burly Greek god), I said, Martin, something terribly odd happened earlier today when I was with J.H. Prynne at Pembroke. And so I proceeded to tell him about Prynne, how he had reacted with such strange intensity, even animus, to my proposal about Frank O'Hara's famous poem.

You know, said Martin, That's really strange, because, and I am not making this up, there is a kind of urban legend about Prynne as the Grand Wizard of a hermetic society dedicated to preserving some kind of secret concerning Frank O'Hara's poetry. Are you serious that this happened?

Yes, I said, and then I told him about the suspicious incident only an hour before with the man in the corner who had appeared to be Iain Sinclair.

Martin's eyes got big and white as cue balls. Iain? Impossible! You're kidding me. I just had steak and eggs with him this morning. He's a perfectly sweet and charming man...

No, I said, I am not kidding. But let's forget about it now, I'm sure it's all just a product of my over-active imagination. What I'd like very much presently is for you to read me a couple poems from one of your last two books.

I'd be delighted to, said Martin. I think you like this piece on Colour, by Thomas Swan, in *Nota*, no? And so he read that mysterious lyric, very quietly, in a sing-song voice, and with what seemed like a yearning out of deep Tyme. And then he read "Keats's House and the Sabine Villa," from the manuscript of the forthcoming *Swallows*, and then this, from the same: a Bachelard-like passage of prose in the book's section that is by the heteronymic William Williamson:

The line moves the point along in two dimensions. With the acceptance of the fragment the outside of the poem's event is indicated simultaneously—it becomes three-dimensional. Now, in this poetry of fragment after fragment we experience more than just the poem and its outside, we experience the simultaneity of many poems, all poems, with their own ends and their beginnings—their readings—intersecting—their lives in the space of being read—on the page just now we see self-consciously noted a fourth-dimensionality.

The page indicates poems moving and arriving.

The space of the poem is blown open like the body is blown open.

We collect ourselves by collecting the world. It is a visualized model of the processes of the mind, as we wish to enter the forbidden chambers of the self.

The dream of interiority is man's slow acceptance of the distancing caused by self-conscious existence. It is a quick circuit built to bridge that space between what is and what was thought. Without consciousness or without language (the vehicle between world and idea of self in world) we might not need to see our eyes as separate from that which we see. We might understand "self" as a fourth-dimensional view over the three dimensional world.

We say 'here is the world'. In the lyric poem we say "here I am"—in the hope, perhaps, that this address will indicate directly—so that language need not offer an alternative to the trace of the body—but every utterance is an immediate divergence—and every telling is of something other than the self. But it is of the body, it is of the body.

§

By now, the early afternoon crowd had gone, and we were in fact sitting almost alone in the Wittgenstein room, only three others there to accompany us: a drunk with his head on the table, an elderly Vicar sipping Scotch by the hearth, and a handsome young man I had seen at the CCCP proceedings. The latter glowered at us from the corner, and this stoked my already considerable paranoia! I would much later learn his name to be Michael Robbins, and this young man (serendipitously to become, by and by, a contributor to *Chicago Review*) would come to play a strange role in the bigger mystery that is the subject of my novella, but the details will have to wait until a forthcoming chapter, whose events are set in the northern mountains of Chile.

But I outpace myself. My point is that the place was near empty, so there was no public reaction to Martin's reading as there was to the ones by Andrew Duncan and Tim Atkins. He closed his notebook and sat down. I saw some sweat pouring from Martin's golden sideburns.

§

Well, back in Freeport again now, and as chance would choose, Martin Corless-Smith's *Swallows* was in the packet sent to me by the *Chicago Review*, and as I began to leaf through this brilliant book, I began to take some notes, having in mind also as I did, his previous book, *Nota*, which like *Swallows*, has a fictional poet at its heart, this being the seventeenth-century Thomas Swan, in whose voice Martin had read at the pub, the other, in the newer book, being John Wilkinson, a poet from the 1940s, whose prose you have just read, for I quoted it. And as I read, thoroughly delighted and enchanted,

dizzied by the conception of it all, I began to excitedly jot down, in as tiny a hand as I could, for it is my fashion, some notes and quotations, some of which I reproduce here, and in quite random selection:

—*The fragment, which effloresces, by accretion, into ecstatic measure*

—*The spurious and imaginary (Swan, Wilkinson, invented quotation) as a means into a prosody of notational, provisional speculation, etc.*

—*A dissolution of attribution and agency throughout the work to the point of almost hearing Beckett's question, "What does it matter who is speaking?"*

—*A cumulative force of anonymous presence writing, even though under the sign of a Signature, and this is a paradox, for sure. But who else has accomplished this with such surging, tidal effect?*

—*Nota shows how a new poetry can branch out, flower, via shifts of authorial placement and purview [don't use purview too often]. The phrase, that is, being authorial displacement...*

—*Steffen Brown on Corless-Smith, at his blog, Cutbank Poetry: "Throughout, the verse slips seamlessly from lyric to pastoral, refusing to concretize a boundary for the world in which they operate. The poems adopt different voices, some seemingly imagined and some historical, which produce a dreamlike poetic of impermanence and importance."*

—*In Nota, though the Swan section is clearly marked mid-way through the book, it is as if Corless-Smith unfolds out of him, as if the book begins with Swan, an absence, a cipher, and then erodes, laterally, luminously, toward its beginning and ending.*

—*Corless-Smith: "the poem is just a patch/of sunlight moving over grass/over a breathing field." [ask him here about his relation to the reader, his dissolution into the reader...]*

—*Steffen Brown again: "Like Horace's Sabine Villa, these poems resist attachment to an actual place in the world, and instead they hover above the crossroads of history and imagination."*

—*His work grounded in a Romantic sensibility; poetry as emerging from "reflections on the acts of the mind itself" [Biographia Literaria]. Which is perfectly postmodern, too, of course...But in his work there is an unashamed yearning for vision, a reaching out toward "mystery," outmoded as that may be.*

—*Thomas Traherne enters both books, quoted, ghosted in allusion and para-*

phrase. The memory of being with Forrest at the Rare Manuscripts Room of the British Library and Traherne's huge, thick "burned bookum" brought out to us; remember how we began to cry as we turned its heavy pages (careful not to let our tears fall upon them!), the pages completely covered, up to a quarter of the way through the incunabulum, in precise, spidery script... Never published; anonymous and waiting...

—The conflation of poetry and prose, flowing from Wordsworth's call in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," anticipating Pound's own call, which is generally seen as key part of the Modernist break with Romanticism; No, not quite... In fact, Traherne anticipates Wordsworth, and before Traherne, Donne, in the *Meditations*. Corless-Smith gets his fuel from this inwreathing of modes, which is nothing less, at high stations, than the blessed confusion of ecstatic transport...

—It's Traherne who says "The world was more in me than I in it." And in Corless-Smith, one finds in the suffusions, exfoliations, and nomadic rangings of the bookum's body, an open-valved world speaking through it and its form: verse and prose and personal citation, sometimes true, often false... The dispersals of its attentions speak simultaneously of sublime authorial control and wild dictatorial abandonment...

—There is so much difference at play, so many names and voices, some real, some not, sometimes the real names saying things that are not and vice-versa. And there are the personae, namely Swan, the seventeenth-century poet in *Nota*, and Williamson, the ca. WW II poet in *Swallows*, and they erupt amidst a foliage of lyrical bursts, journal-like entries, drafts of passages, citations, and so on, so many of them toned to a Romantic-era phrasal key... and it is hard to tell where the author, Martin Corless-Smith, begins and leaves off, where the branch of his identity in the bookum stops and all these othernesses begin branching and flowering. Not petals on a wet, black bough, as it were, but petals scattered and drowned in a flowing stream... Why this prosody, if prosody is the word? Why this writing of oneself into utter dispersal?

—Traherne: "A universe enclosed in skin."

—Corless-Smith's poetics as insistently, ecstatically (and that term insists itself) phenomenological—a constant fractalling out to inter-subjectivity, the implicit sense that Self without relation, without the confluences and creations of otherness, cannot come into higher order...

—In the work, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" charted via a cross-textual leaping, feeling's filament stretched invisibly between anchoring moments. The web that is woven catches the darting swallows of the reader's thought, holds them, spread-winged (in disappearing moments).

And so I wrote Martin an email, in my miniature-font style, and this is what I said:

Dear Martin: Kent Johnson here. How are you? I think often of the pleasant time we spent together in Cambridge. I think of the time, too, in London, though perhaps that wasn't so pleasant...Listen, I am reviewing Swallows (and I suppose Nota, too, I regard them as linked) for the upcoming issue of Chicago Review, and I am going to do it a bit differently than your standard review, I think. We'll see what happens. I would very much appreciate your sending me any comments on the book that you might find worth my consideration as I mull things over. How you see the book, the overall conceptual push of the work, its place vis-a-vis the other "dominant" approaches within the UK avant, etc.

I ask this very rapidly and awkwardly, on my way out of town tomorrow for a spell where and when I hope to get some work done on this, so hoping against hope you might be able to write me just a few notes before tomorrow! (In responding, would you please do so in size #8 font, as I happen to favor [it is an idiosyncrasy] email in such miniaturesque setting.)

And he kindly replied, the following day:

Poems are at once sites of desired presence and necessary absence. Absence. The swallow is a migratory songster at home on the wing. They mark the return of summer though of course summer never returns. The returning swallow is not the same swallow. Birds are perhaps the most musical of all creatures. They form a giant chorus over the cities of man. Their songs are uncomposed, and immediate performances without author. The poem is always anonymous. The voice is a collective...Consciousness visits the poem. The origins of the poem are mysterious even to the poet. The poet never arrives on the scene, but migrates between poem and world. We are never in the past the present or the future. That we can never comprehend the poem. That we can never comprehend the present.

Self is the name we give that place we often notice. The soul wanders through the house. Horace's Sabine Villa is a poem. The poem is a green common. John Keats's Nightingale. His house (rented) on Hampstead Heath. Where he went to save his health. There is there a sign, as you memorably know:

*This plum tree
Replaces the one beneath which
John Keats wrote
Ode To A Nightingale*

There isn't ever a book but books. An author is of other authors. Nota was numerous books arriving simultaneously. Swallows is an extended metaphor of the same. The role of the book is to be active like consciousness. Every book fills the present atemporally. The end of the book is written through the beginning. Immediately the world accepts the book. The poet anonymously joins the rank of reader. Consciousness is mortality. Books are the dream of immortality. Horace's Ghost walks the Sabine Vale. I had written Swallows straight through after Nota. It was not separate—but after numerous readings it became differently organized. Each book is like a reading of the previous book. Nota was from notebooks—and is not a book. Swallows is verb and noun, palindromical as without beginning or end.

I found these comments very interesting, so I wrote back, seeking more:

Dear Martin: Everything seems to dissolve into reading. Is this part of the meaning? That an encompassing anonymity seeps up through the act of writing? That the reader, who is everything, is to glimpse this anonymity at the core of her being? That there is no author?

And Martin wrote back:

We need not choose to privilege the role of reader over that of author, though it is of course quite possible to understand a good poem managing more than was intended by the poet, and in the end the poem might be said to partake of an “intuitive verbal latency,” a phrase of Jakobson’s that avoids privileging either the author or the reader. Heidegger’s assessment of Trakl’s poem “A Winter Evening” agrees that “Who the author is remains unimportant here, as with every other masterful poem,” but goes even further in deciding that “the mastery consists precisely in this, that the poem can deny the poet’s person and nature.” Whether we agree or not, it is plain that there is a consistent critical acceptance that language, and in particular poetic language, exists without inhering to the confines of an authorial self.

*So poems might be seen as sites of exultant languaging, rather than the home of a coherent self. I believe there is a consistent and compelling argument for all poems being, in some sense, anonymous. Now, this is easy to assert for anonymous poems, but does it remain persuasive even for poems under authorial signature? Having argued consistently and variously for an understanding of authority as unstable, even a critic like Denise Riley (in her deep book, *The Words of Selves, do you know it?*) seems to flinch at the sign of the signature: “even if creativity is conceived as really a matter of endless refashioning and involuntary plagiarizing, it still retains, in the lonely fact of the signature, its final flourish of individuation.” But I think we need not see the lurking signature as too serious a threat to the thesis of communal necessity (and functional anonymity) in the making of a poem. Of course, you likely disagree, and I would like to talk with you about this next time we meet, hopefully under more peaceful circumstances than was the case at Keats’s house! :-)*

Well, this is a thick topic and there is so much to say. Maybe I’ll try to work up an essay on this matter of the Anonymus. But perhaps, in the end, rather than a commonplace acceptance of the functional anonymity of all texts, what we seem to have is pervasive authority—which is, yet, something else, that cannot quite be grasped or named...And perhaps one way of understanding the pervasive slippage from written text to authorial presence is as an enactment of the desire for the divine and such an attempt proposes (consciously or not) a transmigration of the author in person to the self in text, so that the author becomes in some way immortal. In this scenario the text would need to become identical with the author. I’m uncertain where the reader would exist in such a scenario; perhaps her body would become the host for the author’s transmigrated soul, held in the writing.

I mean, we might choose to understand acceptance of structural anonymity as going some way towards accepting inevitable mortality, and beyond that, shifting from a monotheistic faith in the author to a non-hierarchical acceptance of communal existence in a necessarily shared language system.

§

Well, I promised to tell about the events that transpyred during the pilgrimage that Martin and I made to Keats's house in London... We arrived at King's Cross and took the tube to Hampstead and walked immediatelie up the street to the secrete stairs that lead to the hidden alley that leads, in turne, to the Holly Bush, one of London's oldest and most venerable publets, a place where almost all the Romantic poets drank, includynge, famously, Keats, who is reputed to have wrytten sections of "Hyperion" there. We drank a couple of pints and talked about hime.

Shall we go now to The Flask? said Martin.

Sure, I said, I'd like that very much.

So we walked down past the tube stop and tooke a sharp left up the first alley, and we sat there for a while, and there was a huge dog in the publet, a cross, it seemed, between a Great Dane and some large species of Boxer, and its darke bullocks dangled with astonishynge profligacy between its haunches, to the immense delyght of all the patrons there, a mixed crowd of working class and professional types, who made many clever but unflattering remarks about Tony Blair in relation to what hung there, in the longe and heavy sack.

We talked for a while about Wordsworth and Coleridge, and then the famous U.S. writer Robert Coover came into the publet, whom I recognized, since I had met hime at a readynge I'd given at Brown a few months before.

Hi Robert, I said, I'd forgotten you had an apartment in Hampstead, but now I remember, and how are you?

Robert had been, as I said, at my readynge, but he clearly didn't recognize me now, which was a bit deflating, but I reminded hime, and he said, Oh, yes, of course, and that dissipated the awkwardness just a byt, and he sat down and I introduced hime to Martin, and we pointed out the dog and laughed and made smalle talke for a spell, though things got a byt uncomfortable when Martin said, suddenlie, but quite innocentlie, So, Robert, what's happened to that whole hypertext thing—don't hear much about that these days...

But we smoothed that over, and by and by Martin pleasantlie said, Well, Robert, it's four o' clock, and Kent and I are on our way to Keats's house, and they close at 5:30, I believe, so we really must go, but we'd be delighted if you would accompany us.

That's kind of you, said Robert, But I have to get back because I am meeting Salman Rushdie for dinner tonight in Covent Garden.

Oh, that's nice, we both said, Be careful, ha, ha... And so we bid hime good bye, it had been a brief but convivial chat, and when we rose to go, I noticed, in the corner, a large manum with a dark suit and a black fedora

pulled downe over his eyes, clearly eyeing us over his newspaper... And there, on his hande, was a large, whyte opal ring! He looked quicklie down at the news that is to be found there.

Aided by my many-pinted comferte now, I shut my eyes for a spelle and forced down my apprehensyon and alarmum, thinkynge to myself that a paranoia was really starting to get the beste of me, that really this was all quite silly, a fantasy (for after all, certainlye, in London there are any number of men with such rings!), and I didn't say anythyng of it to Martin as we walked light-headedly through the elegant leafy streets of Hampstead, past the great Dada-artist John Heartfield's old house and the house of John Constable and the house of Dame Edith Sitwell, amonge others.

So let's hope there aren't any assassins from the Secret O'Hara Society waiting for us at Keats's place, joked Martin, alluding innocentlie to our conversation of previous day at The Eagle.

Hilarious, I said.

We walked through the gate and said hello to an attractive Indian woman going out, pushing a rosy baby in a perambulator. Martin poynted out Keats's plum tree in the garden, a "replica" in the exact locatiome of the original. It was in a riot of bloom. I thought to myself that this was a special visit for Martin, and that perhaps he would lyke to be alone as he wandered around, and so I said, Martin, I think I will just stay outside here in the garden while you take a looke inside, OK?

Are you sure, Kent? he said, and I could telle he was pleased by this.

Sure, I said, Go ahead.

And so I walked around the outsyde of the whole house, it was quite gorgeous, and I pictured, as I did so, the places where the famous Poet surely sat or walked, and finally after a while I came back to the plum tree, and I went over to it and stood beneath it, no one else in sight, inhaling its deepe fragrance, listenynge to the soft buzz of the bees.

And a great force came downe upon the back of my head, and then a blackness, and I fell onto my face. And as I halfe came-to, I looked up and saw through a milky haze the form of a large man in a darke suit and black fedora, as he ran out the gate...And then I passed out againe.

Kent! My God, Kent, wake up!

It was Martin, shouting at me. And behind hime were various people, includynge a bobby with his tall surreale hat, all of them with appearances of great concern on their faces.

What happened? said Martin.

The man in the darke suit hit me on the headum, I said.

Oh, my, said Martin, Well, and he apparently left this note paper-clipped to your jacket...

What nota, I said.

This one, said Martin. It says, 'Desist, As of Now, Motherfucker, Signed, The Sun.'

And then I felt the blood running warm down my face and neckum. Put your head far back and pinch the bridge of your nose, commanded the bobby. I did, and saw the endlesse cloud of white blossoms of Keats's tree all above me, and for some reason, in my delirium, the vivid image of a certain famous British poet's roguishly handsome face filled my minde. And then everythyng went darke againe.

The next installment in this series will concern the recent poetry and very suspicious activities of Mr. Keston Sutherland, to appear in a venue not yet determined.

Kent Johnson