



***Drive-In Picture Show* by Gary Parrish**

Erudite Fangs, 2010

50 pages

Cover design, interior design
and typesetting

by H.R. Hegnauer

Original art work

by George Schneeman

Reviewed by [Sean Burke](#)

Reviewing Gary Parrish's *Drive-In Picture Show*, perhaps it's interesting to note that Pound's famed elements of poetry (namely, phanopoeia, melopoeia, and logopoeia), broadly understood as the play of image, music/sound, and meaning, apply as fittingly to the medium of film as they do poetry. Though, admittedly, this is a rather unprofound statement, I mention it because it seems lost on certain movie-goers who want from films nothing more than entertaining stories. Such people can be confounded by "difficult" movies in which the elements of the film are so integral to one's understanding of what is happening on screen that it becomes hard to tell someone who hasn't yet seen the movie what it is "about." *Pierrot le Fou*, for instance, is hardly a story about a man mixed-up with gun runners. And *Eraserhead*: how even attempt to explain? Similarly, there's a question of how one faithfully describes a book of poems. What is *Drive-In Picture Show* about?

The poems in *Drive-In Picture Show*, Parrish's debut, are often predicated on events without being "about" them. Instead, Parrish culls from his life's events the luminous details, to use another of Pound's terms, which he transforms into the materials of a poetry that deftly manages to balance human sentiment with surreal wonderment. Even in his most straightforward poems, Parrish conveys a surreal undertone through a sort of poetic *mise-en-scène* in which the ground under one's feet may seem unsteady, or objects are cast in new, strange light. The poems in this collection often seem to enact memories, at once both real and fantastical. Fragmentary perceptions assemble into the *occasion* of poetry, like Jean Cocteau in *Testament of Orpheus* piecing together petals to re-member the flower. Moreover, these memories are never allowed to settle and resolve, but are presented to the reader in a quick-shifting montage in which language, ideas, and images can entwine, loosen, and re-forged, occupying liminal spaces between living and dreaming, life and actuality. Sense, eclipsed between images, resurfaces as enigma:

A Luna Moth strikes the head of a Dung Beetle
Passing to my left I recognize my father

(*Several Black Banners*)

A meditative quality underlies the poems, reminiscent of Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues* as well as certain poems by Ginsberg, in that Parrish seems to begin from a total immersion in thought-

processes, only to try and improvise a way out, allowing the form to take shape as it transpires. In this way, he creates tension between his thoughts and what is unknown, with the poem acting as intermediary, intermezzo.

When the
thought of a
pebble becomes
the thought of a
plum

we stare at one
another and
casually shrug
our shoulders.

(Oldest Joke in The World)

The speaker in this collection, multiplicitous in personas, emerges one minute as highly playful with Parrish's characteristic wit:

me softly smiling her deliberately eating a sandwich.

(Cheap Date)

the next minute as crude provocateur:

standing in the kitchen
& turning me on
is not the only feminist thing

I dig about you

(Manifest as Birds)

Then, momentarily, he may relegate personality to the peripheries, allowing objects in the poem to speak for themselves

karma, dog parts
jet packs, pieces of confetti

(Passing through Purgatory)

before returning with the kind of perfectly-timed and simply-worded sentiment that, given its proper context, never fails to bowl the reader over with its understated grace. Indeed, Parrish's most enviable talent may well be his ability to deliver a gorgeous or gut-wrenchingly vulnerable line at exactly the right moment.

Like in the work of Parrish's aforementioned Beat forebears, traditional themes of love, sex, and death become recurrent motifs, and it seems wholly refreshing and honest—especially now

when the critical theory that invigorated an older generation's avant garde has become a tired trope of undergrad workshops—for an experimental poet such as Parrish to be more concerned with his own mortality and sex life than, say, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome. Such classical preoccupations, however, never manifest the same way twice in Parrish's work as individual poems range from intensely personal to funny to darkly fantastical and can turn from one to the other on a dime in associative leaps bound together only by their strong intuitive sense and propulsive rhythm:

was it wrong of you to rise again
slowly over a cascade of fresh water
with your face toweled dry
noticing with clarity a withered body
draped over the calcium in your bones.
A gun shot ruminates through a room of granite
the building is semi-abandoned tenants of mice
sweep through the halls scurry in the dust
like several thousand rats unleashed
into the urban open air they move easily
they want to blend they merge everywhere.

(Calcium in Your Bones)

If, as Kerouac asserts, a "movie in words" is "the visual American form" then *Drive-In Picture Show* is something one must see for oneself. To say that Parrish's poetry is about this or that is to ignore the fact that he has pulled the rug out from beneath you as you made your assertions, and the ground beneath you now looks an awful lot like the sky. To be sure, it is a dark and comic world he has created in these pages, in which one must, and does, take courage from the mere fact of existing

made it simple again and that's enough

(Self-Portrait)

but the poetry is often between moments, in the tension created between objects and dreams, memories and presence, thought and non-thought, laughter and the long silence that follows.