

Small Reviews of Small Books

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I'm a fan of small books. Whether this means a short book, a chapbook, a novella, a "novel" that is only 20 pages (consider Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* or Marguerite Duras's *Man Sitting in the Corridor*), a journal, a zine, whatever, brevity is a form I appreciate. I find this especially true when considering that the standard length of a novel has progressively become further and further bloated as time has gone on. I've noticed that small books rarely get any attention, rarely get reviewed. As such, it is my intention, as some one who reads a lot of small books, to start publicly discussing the small books that I read, to help highlight the fact that small books should not be ignored. This is the first batch of hopefully many more to come.

Cantos for the Crestfallen – Pseudo-Leopardi

Trs. A. Necrezuta, F. Pilastru & I. Imaculata

[gnOme Books](#)

I'm a fan of gnOme Books's project of publishing "secret" and "pseudonymous" texts, especially in an age where the ego of the author regularly outweighs the work itself (and as such, refuses to allow the author to be consumed into the work, which is a mark of writing that is important when considering Blanchot's approach to literature). This short volume of 31 poems, each one seven 3-line stanzas of almost uniform line-length, presents itself as the once-lost work of a Romanian student in Italy. It wears its influences on its sleeves, but that's not a negative, as the work of the saints, pushing for a sort of negative mysticism, is something that one should regularly interrogate. To write as the other is to lose the self, and the loss of self is an inherent element of mysticism. While the work herein does little of interest in terms of form (for what is poetry without an attention to form, even in attention to formlessness), the content is fascinating.

HER TWIN WAS AFTER ME – Ally Harris

[Slim Princess Holdings](#)

As I feel like I regularly voice my discontent with poetry collections, in the sense that most of the time the book as a whole is not accounted for and as such feel likes one poem to the next has little transition, etc, I'll save myself from overindulging in that topic here. However, with that said, there's a variety of forms on display here and Harris's work functions best for me in two specific modes: in an inherent verticality (which reminds me of Bernard Noël's thoughts on how poetry repositions speech into the vertical column, thus imposing a hierarchy over speech in terms of the artistic precedent this sets—and in terms of how this is positioning language visually on the page—we see poetry as much as we can hear it) and in the prose-poem blocks that make up most of the second half of the book. Overall, the poems that stick out most pair a sense of contemporary living and the problems therein with an actively linguistic reconstruction: the incidental appears with very well crafted lines, thus positioning the work far away from the ghetto of Alt-Lit. Despite the fact that it doesn't excite me as a book, the poems on their own make for a fantastic read.

In Pieces – Rosmarie Waldrop[O’Clock Press](#)

Gorgeous and brief book from O’Clock, collecting 16 prose poems from Waldrop, who is almost single-handedly responsible (along with her husband Keith) for bringing half of my favorite works of poetry in translation into the world (together, Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop run Burning Deck Press, while Rosmarie herself is the translator of Edmund Jabès oeuvre). The poems are linked in their form and construction, though not by content. Taking on a first person perspective, often addressing a “you” which is positioned either as the reader herself or another person “outside” of the presumed narrative. Deserving of closer scrutiny on my part.

Ships of Theseus – Christian Hawkey[Dikembe Press](#)

I picked this up being quite a fan of Hawkey’s *Ventrakl* but being entirely unfamiliar with any of his other work, and out of a desire to support Dikembe Press as they seem to have an interesting project. I’ve sat on this for a while, at first overwhelmed by the density of the text for some reason, but upon picking it up today I fell into it easily. What I mistook, visually, for density actually translates into a sort of breathlessness in the poem itself—fragments and phrases strung together with semi-colons, in ways reminds one of some of Collobert’s work. There’s a touch of narrative here, occasionally swerving into thematic obsessions of my own (labyrinths, monstrous orgasms), but that is to be expected if you consider the title (the real question is of the absence of the minotaur, or non-absence?). The black squares that “punctuate,” perhaps, each page operate as small voids, a larger breath in between the breathless stanzas of the poem. A satisfying work overall.

Independence – Pierre Guyotat[Semiotext\(e\)](#)

Released initially for Guyotat’s reading tour of the US (as he only read in NYC, LA and SF, skipping Chicago of course, I regrettably missed out on this by about 6 months), and later ‘folded into’ the brilliant & necessary Semiotext(e) pamphlet series, this short volume is a more-than-welcome addition to the small but growing oeuvre of Guyotat’s available in English. On the surface this is a narrative about Guyotat’s time being imprisoned by “French military security for political rebellion” during the Algerian war, but more carefully read this ends up being a reflection on the nature of language itself, filtered at two key points through William Faulkner’s *The Mansion*. Guyotat is always one to remind that language comes out of existence, and has, throughout his career, demonstrated that the best mode to deliver what one has learned is not necessarily a purely mimetic realism (see *Eden, Eden, Eden* and *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers*). Despite this, *Independence* offers a much more straight-forward sense of articulate memory, emphasizing the necessity of freedom.