Cautionary Tales
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them, annotating the syntax with emphasis that the syntax would not otherwise provide."

Another way Hogue employs line endings—annotating, and also parsed and end-stopped—is to dole out images or ideas line by line. The senses focus on one thing, then another, as a scene unfolds. The middle of section 1 of “Étude (on Power)” demonstrates this mixing of line endings and this pacing:

Your eyes scaling the wall, rappelling down the other side. Fear fear no more, the heat of it.

You sit across from empty cartons
cluttering the round table
of the new office. Cathedral-
celinged. The burnished glow of veranda shades covering a porch’s antique calm.

The reader’s mind moves up a wall, then down the other side, each line creating distinct movement. The rappelling induces fear, but the next stanza redefines that fear. The reader imagines sitting, then notices the cartons across the way, then the table, finally taking in the entirety of the scene as an office. A cathedral becomes high ceilings, then light from behind shades. The senses focus in the entirety of the scene as an office. A cathedral becomes high ceilings, then light from behind shades. The senses focus on one thing, then another, as a scene unfolds. The middle of section 1 of “Étude (on Power)” demonstrates this mixing of line endings and this pacing:

cautionary tales

HORSE, FLOWER, BIRD
Kate Bernheimer
Art by Rikki Ducornet
Coffee House Press
http://www.coffeehousepress.org
185 pages; paper, $14.95

As a physical object, Kate Bernheimer’s collection of stories Horse, Flower, Bird evokes nostalgia for the way books drew us in as children. The generous white space between spare, quiet sentences leaves us hungering for more pages. Rikki Ducornet’s chimeric illustrations coax our powers of imagination. The book’s slight size is light in the palms of our hands. But we quickly find that the experience of reading fairy tales has changed since childhood. Or rather, we’ve changed, our lenses now those of world-worn adults.

Bernheimer’s prose is Spartan and frank, like that of a child, but gracefully, beautifully so.

Bernheimer’s tales are anything but cuddly and cozy. Her narratives hold a mirror up to Western constructions of gender, and the reflections disturb and chill. Bernheimer takes up the feminist charge of legendary writers like Angela Carter, adopting the fairy-tale structure to illuminate how our narratives, especially the ones we feed children, train women for brainless sexual domestication. Yet unlike Carter’s lush lyrical prose, Bernheimer’s is Spartan and frank, like that of a child, but gracefully, beautifully so.

Indeed, many of her protagonists are children—little girls who play games of suffering and rape and torture, who learn to find pleasure in deprivation, who learn to find pleasure in deprivation, who learn to find pleasure in deprivation, who learn to find pleasure in deprivation, who learn to find pleasure in deprivation. Yet unlike Carter’s fairy-tale structure to illuminate how our narratives, especially the ones we feed children, train women for brainless sexual domestication. Yet unlike Carter’s lush lyrical prose, Bernheimer’s is Spartan and frank, like that of a child, but gracefully, beautifully so.

Some of the poems are more prosy (“On Bumps River”) or self-conscious (“The Fact of Speech”), but Hogue’s poetic technique serves each poem. And often, the poems are hard hitting, even political.

“The Green Card Is Not Green” and “An Hour from Town (Terezín)” are two particularly poignant and historically resonant poems, both dealing with who is an insider or outsider, who has what sort of home, and who is right, has rights, practices rites, and can write. Another poem overtly historical-political is the middle section of the collection, “New Orleans Suite: Ars Cora/Under Erasure.” In the note that precedes this section, Hogue explains that she draws “upon a slave story I never forgot,” the story of Arsene, also known as Cora, the last slave to sue for her freedom and back wages—she “won her case and disappeared from all records.” Here, Hogue creates a new record for Arsene/Cora.

Cynthia Hogue is shaping contemporary American poetry.

Or Consequence is Cynthia Hogue’s sixth poetry collection and her second from Red Hen Press, a nonprofit literary press started in 1994. Her recent work also includes When the Water Came (2010), a book about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath drawn from interviews with Gulf Coast residents, along with photographs by Rebecca Ross. Hogue edited, with Elisabeth Frost, the anthology Innovative Women Poets (2007), which includes poems and interviews. Cynthia Hogue, through her poetry and other projects, is shaping contemporary American poetry. Or Consequence concludes, then, with a linguistic and political trajectory: “What we know is / hope, and say, We are / hopeful, we have hope.”

Anna Leahy is the author of Constituents of Matter, which won the Wick Poetry Prize. She teaches in the MFA and BFA programs at Chapman University and directs Tabula Poetica.

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Yet under the humor is the truth that domestication is often at the heart of marriage, a domestication that miniaturizes the wife, keeping her in a permanent state of girlhood, hanging gaunt curtains and Christmas lights to dress up the house that cages her, disguising it as something fun.

In “A Garibaldi Tale,” the narrator invokes language rather than lights to cope with the role society’s assigned her. Partially deaf with webbed toes, labeled “simple,” “the child with few concerns,” she is blended into the persona of her deaf, web-toed aunt, and the two of them are referred to collectively as “Auntie and Auntie.” Left out of the fishing and working life at the docks, the girl acts out narratives of femininity in rhymes she pens herself. After her sister overhears her professing her love about a boy who sells cheese, she realizes that she doesn’t love the boy but rather the sound of words about him. She has been taught to desire this construction of language, which posits a girl yearning after a boy. When another boy, “a nicer boy,” finds her in a shed and they have sex, readers realize how misleading this narrative is. Bernheimer writes, “I laid careful the burlap sack and kissed him. Then some other things happened. Though the things were unfamiliar they caused no harm.” The nonchalance used to describe her first sexual encounters is disorienting. That the girl describes herself as a voiceless fish at the end of the story speaks volumes. And to extend the metaphor just a bit further, take the title, “Garibaldi,” the girl’s town, which takes its name from a type of fish whose male members boldly attack anything that comes near the female or her eggs.

In Horse, Flower, Bird, Bernheimer’s fourth book, femininity is portrayed as a series of traumas shaped by language. Despite its playful packaging, this book recasts the genre’s cautionary messages of old-world fairy tales. Bernheimer’s message? “‘[B]e careful what you read.’”

Tessa Mellas is a PhD student in English and comparative literature at the University of Cincinnati. Her fiction has appeared in Fugue, Gulf Coast, Hayden’s Ferry Review, Light Speed Magazine, New Orleans Review, and StoryQuarterly and is forthcoming in Pank and Washington Square.

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**NEW FRONTIER OF MINIMALISM**

**John Domini**

A critic’s conundrum: the book that’s easy to praise but hard to describe. Consider for instance Dawn Raffel’s new collection of stories, Further Adventures in the Restless Universe. I can say confidently that it’s difficult to imagine this sort of thing done better—indeed, two or three of the pieces strike me as nothing short of masterful—but to put a name to what she’s doing remains desperate work. Of course labels exist, in the reviewer’s lexicon. “Minimalist” is the brand that tends to get respect, since it’s worn by the likes of Raymond Carver, but the designation remains awfully loose, and comparisons to Carver would badly misrepresent Raffel. On the other hand, newer nomenclature like “short-shorts” seems worn, a mere pet name. Nor am I comfortable working up some fresh coinage, like “fiction of the resonant ellipse,” since the definition would take up half the review at least. The emphasis here must be on Raffel’s new contribution, worth celebrating whatever its category.

Further Adventures runs a scant hundred pages, and a few of its fictions take up less than one of those. The opener, “Near Taurus,” comprises just twenty lines of print, in eleven paragraphs, with three brief quotations. Yet “Near Taurus” relates a tale recognizable to any lover who fumbled his or her initial play and was unable to any lover who fumbled his or her initial play

**FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE RESTLESS UNIVERSE**

Dawn Raffel

Drané Books

http://www.dzancbooks.org

100 pages; paper, $14.95

Along with stories like “Our Heaven,” “The Interruption” helps to sketch a family-saga structure for the whole of these Adventures. The opener is that fairy tale of first love (yet lacking in sensuality, beyond the feel of grave-dirt), all move by fits and starts to some momentary reassertion of family (even when you’re about to put family on hold), and the closer, “Beyond All Blessing and Song, Praise and Consolation,” features a big middle-American family get-together, with three or four generations around the table and ghost-quotation from the verse on the Statue of Liberty (though the story’s Earth Mother dies, and conclusion’s rich with prevarication: “We cannot look. We cannot but look”). Raffel’s toolkit is so spare, her constructions leave plenty of gaps, and the stops and starts can suggest stanza breaks, more about development of an image than increments in narrative movement or psychological penetration. Well then, what defines Raffel’s endeavors as fiction, other than typography and layout? The question, as she frames it, presents no easy answer. Certainly, one notes the absence of regular rhythm, still the secret heartbeat of nearly all poetry.

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