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## Neck of the World

F. Daniel Rzicznek

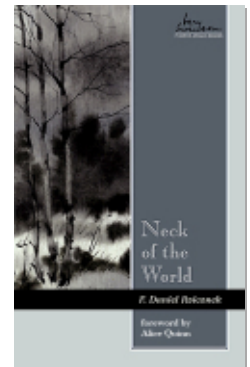
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## FOREWORD

Reading and rereading the poems in *Neck of The World* prompted me to return to and dwell upon the aphorisms grouped under the heading “Adagia” in Wallace Stevens’s *Opus Posthumous*. A few of the “Adagia” are as gnomic and unforgettable as the poems in this debut collection:

One reads poetry with one’s nerves.  
We have to step boldly into man’s interior world or not at all.  
A poem need not have a meaning, and, like most things in nature,  
often does not have.  
Poetry is a pheasant disappearing in the brush.

Poetry, Stevens noted elsewhere, “makes itself manifest in a kind of speech that comes from secrecy.” Daniel Rzicznek’s poems cast their spell, it seems to me, because they invite us (like his white crane in the pond in the poem, “Primer”) “to the bottom’s murk/ silent as snow-melt . . .”, to the seedbed of their own making.

“The first successful poems of young poets,” Auden said, are “made up of magical lyrical phrases which seem to rise involuntarily to the consciousness.” There are countless examples of such mesmerizing phrases here. Daniel Rzicznek writes of the “threadbare light binding the valley” in “A Mouthful of Crickets.” And in the same poem,

The dream of the cave is a means,  
a must, a smell crawling solid  
through the foglike arms of trees.

“Prayer for Fall” evokes “damp swamp light,/ springheeled by the burnt gusts/ of foliage.” In “Host,” “Winter hangs/ glinting on its hook of light.” And from “Hibernacula,” “Into the woods the bear becomes/ darkness hedged by darkness.” Throughout, the language pulsates, always vigorous, by turns knotty and crystalline. In “Donnybrook,” he describes the arrival of a storm in winter,

The opal everywhere eyes  
of a lightning-spoiled virgin,  
branches dangling icy triggers,  
the world’s envelope open:  
extremities numb, a long  
and erasing bellow, the onrush,

the tentacles of snow.

Listen: we live each for the other.

“Newness (not novelty) may be the highest value in poetry,” Stevens wrote. In *Neck of the World*, we have a poet with a striking new vision--challenging, rewarding, and bold.

Alice Quinn

# NECK OF THE WORLD

*Sometimes you look for the world, and it's there.*

—Tom Andrews

*I am whatever beast inhabits me.*

—Charles Simic