

## No Success Like Failure

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[1989]

When I got home from the earthquake my house was junk. The chimney had imploded, littering the living room with bricks and granite and a thick layer of mortar dust pulverized by the shock. Amid the rubble lay much of my library. Artworks and furniture were mangled, shivers of glass strewn over the floor, the kitchen covered with flood and utensils flung around the room. Ancient cobwebs had been shaken loose, drooping like tired ghosts. A large chunk of masonry, still stuck in the ceiling where the chimney once stood, hung over a hole that used to be the hearth, now a pile of debris in the basement. “Take a deep breath, feel like you’re choking,” I thought I heard Bob Dylan wheeze from a track on his new album—“Everything is broken.”

Having come from the fresh destruction downtown, roaming astounded among the new ruins in the dazed curiosity and awe of the first hours, I felt oddly calm surveying the evidence of my personal disaster. Perhaps I’d attained the objectivity I never had as a journalist. The scene was so different from what my

home had been, I could barely claim a connection. The structure was leaning slightly on its foundation. An atmosphere of pure wreckage lingered in the air, a light sense of detachment and acceptance—humility. It was pointless to be upset; powers far larger than fear had spoken. Such a warm evening, peaceful in its way. Night fell gently. The twilight zone.

All the ordeals at the office suddenly were small. The paper's chronic problems—lack of capital, anemic ad line, staff psychodramas—shrank as survival became the issue. Three friends dining under the stars on crackers, apples and avocado proved the finest banquet imaginable. I relished the taste of my last Pacifico as we listened to the transistor. A camping adventure like this was a vacation from the commercial terrors I'd been suffering for the last three years—advertisers who weasel out on their contracts, unaffordable health insurance, irate readers incensed over our failure to conform to their viewpoint, business owners hot under the collar over an editorial, libel suits, rampaging political power clowns, ruthless competitors, insecure employees working for meager wages, agitated landladies, temperamental typesetting equipment, accounts payable, accounts receivable, meetings, working Sundays, all the nightmares of being your own boss and everyone else's too—it was refreshing to finesse the elements with a cool head and a bag of basic supplies.

Maybe you're familiar with the Fay Wray syndrome. In the movie *King Kong*, female lead Fay Wray finds herself in a sequence of perilous adventures, each more horrifying than the one before, culminating in the climactic scene at the top of the Empire State Building. For Wray all through the movie, it seems like things couldn't possibly get worse—but they keep

getting worse. That's how it's been for me in recent months, one calamity after another, mostly to do with business. The disaster and its economic impact have been a breakthrough: now that Nature has stated its case on top of everything else conspiring to sink *The Sun*, I feel like a free man surrendering to Destiny. At last I'm able to lay my burden down.

Actually it's a privilege to witness such earthshaking events and to be a part of this awesome experience. The cosmic dimensions of the general catastrophe put individual afflictions in perspective. Everybody's in more or less the same rocky boat. It's inconvenient but exciting, dredging up lots of creative muck from the unconscious. Living above Soquel near the epicenter, I feel my psychic batteries being charged almost beyond capacity. Everyone I know is completely freaked in one way or another, as if we're all sharing in the same psychosis, having to talk non-stop, tell stories, console each other, promise to see one another soon in anxious phone calls across the state or across town, an affectionate babble of voices expressing love and comfort.

In my case friends have been calling to send condolences for *The Sun*, a loss for us all but for me a relief as well, an opportunity to start again, go back to being a writer, read some books, take a break. Over the years I've often declared I wasn't going to crucify myself on this business, would only sacrifice so much for its survival. I did it because I wanted something interesting to read and nobody else around here was about to provide it. Again and again I heard from would-be but never-was advertisers that our publication was too heavy, too intellectual, too political, not fun enough, not responsive enough to their commercial needs. So what if thirty thousand people picked us up each week—they couldn't read and shop

at the same time, could they? Such is the dictatorship of the marketplace.

But as Mikhail Gorbachev might say, there's no success like failure. An honest effort to overcome an impossible situation is better than none at all. If I lacked the wisdom to know when to quit—constantly raising money to keep us going despite all odds—larger forces than the need to publish have made the decision for me. I can look more clearly at the daily miracles—waves of vapor rising off damp grass blades in the morning, the autumnal slant of light in the afternoon, my lover's face by candlelight in our temporary shelter—without the overriding administrative angst of one who is responsible for coordinating a complex collective enterprise like putting out a weekly newspaper.

From our tower at the corner of Cedar and Union streets, across from the great black walnut in the city parking lot, we could observe the drama of people going about their business. A cast of downtown characters ranging from raving homeless evangelists to cultural and political dignitaries made for an entertaining spectacle, a voyeur's orgy of gossip and speculation amid the token facts demanded by our profession. Now we look out on a ghostly scene of cyclone fences and security guards and gawkers in search of historic snapshots, and I'm more convinced than ever that reality is more surreal than any poet imagines. The attempt to represent it otherwise, as journalists often do, is one of the greatest fictions of all.

As I patch my house back together over the next few weeks and months, I'll have the leisure to review the mess of evidence proving I existed and to sort out the salvageable treasures from the trash. I say existed because whoever I thought I

was before Quake Tuesday is history, and if I make it through the aftershocks, the storms and the depression, the future is wide open. This morning as I write the air is clear. Life is more beautiful than ever.



## Stein versus Salomon at the Jewish Museum

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[2010]

Was it a subversive stroke of curatorial genius or just a perverse coincidence that San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum mounted concurrently this summer its Charlotte Salomon and Gertrude Stein exhibits? Stein of course is the Mother of All Modernists, the Paris salonkeeper who not only cultivated the budding geniuses of Picasso and Hemingway and Matisse among many others but was herself a formidable literary force, a daring experimenter with language who—for better and for worse—has influenced generations of writers. Salomon was a young German woman who had the bad luck to come of age just as the Nazis were coming to power and, despite fleeing to the south of France in 1938, was arrested there in 1943 and sent to her death at Auschwitz. She was twenty-six.

Salomon was an artist, writer and musician who authored a single sustained work, *Life? or Theatre?*, a series of several hundred gouache paintings with text telling a highly imagi-

native version of her life story, including a “soundtrack” of German popular and classical music—what today might be called a mixed-media or multimedia piece, or the book for a musical tragicomedy, or a graphic novel. Whatever it is, it was truly experimental for its time, but with none of the intellectual trappings or glamour of Stein’s Parisian salons. Stein, much older and making her way assiduously up the cultural hierarchy as an avant-garde tastemaker, reputation-establisher and high priestess of Modernism, was about as far from Salomon’s circumstances as can be imagined, but both were in France at the same time and both were Jewish. Yet they experienced very different fates and fortunes.

The Salomon exhibit was a linear tour through a substantial portion—about three hundred painted pages out of more than seven hundred—of *Life? or Theatre?* To follow the tragic story of the artist’s family, including the suicides of her mother and grandmother, her own coming of age and falling in love with her music teacher, her exile and ultimate doom under France’s Vichy regime, is to be moved both by the urgent energy and beauty of the work and by the terrible sadness of her young death. You wonder what she might have become as an artist, writer and/or musician had she had the chance, but because she happened to be Jewish at a time in Europe when that was a death sentence, all we have of her is this one epic work.

The Stein show, just upstairs, was a completely different kind of exhibition—not of the writer’s writings nor of the art patron’s collection, but a tour of her personage at home in Paris of the 1920s and 30s—many photos and portraits of Stein by her pet artists (and portraits of her white French poodle), her home décor, her clothes, her jewelry, swatches of wallpaper, restaurant



menus, napkins, newspaper clippings, magazine pages, editions of her books—an artifactual record of her cultural persona, the *things* in her domestic and public life that defined her. I could feel as I strolled through this elaborate collection of artifacts the storied force of Stein’s formidable personality, her tireless promotion of her favored artists and of herself, her mastery of the art of self-mythmaking. A genius in her own mind, she aggressively championed that idea in the minds of others, and through a shrewd combination of true accomplishment and skillful public relations established a permanent place for herself in twentieth-century cultural history.

Ezra Pound, her chief American expatriate rival for the throne of modernist pope, referred to Stein as “that old tub of guts,” according to poet and publisher James Laughlin, who worked for both of them one summer as a Harvard student in Europe. Stein in turn dismissed Pound as “a village explainer.” These two monumental egos, like King Kong and Godzilla, fought it out between the wars to determine who could be the bigger blowhard, know-it-all and scoutmaster of up-and-coming literary talent. One thing they had in common was a fondness for fascists: Stein publicly endorsed Franco during the Spanish Civil War and translated for American readers the speeches of Vichy leader Maréchal Pétain (whom she compared to George Washington) during the Nazi occupation of France, while Pound in Italy affiliated himself with Mussolini and famously ranted on the radio during World War II about the sinister conspiracies of Jewish bankers.

Despite her Jewish background, Stein breezed through the war unscathed, protected by her alliance with Bernard Fay, director of France’s Bibliothèque Nationale. (This relationship

is explored by Stein scholar Barbara Will in her book *Unlikely Collaboration*.) In other words, Stein was a collaborator with the Vichy government and, by association, with the Nazis. She told *The New York Times Magazine* in 1934, perhaps sarcastically, that Hitler deserved the Nobel Peace Prize “because he is removing all the elements of contest and struggle from Germany. By driving out the Jews and the democratic left element, he is driving out everything that conduces to activity. That means peace.” Even if, as seems plausible, she was being sarcastic, in light of history this is a rather lame idea of a joke.

None of this is mentioned in the Jewish Museum exhibition, certainly an odd omission in this context, and doubly disturbing when considered alongside the story of Charlotte Salomon, who, lacking Stein’s connections and not sharing her political sympathies, was left to a less distinguished destiny. How the museum could have mounted both shows without acknowledging this grim irony is something I’m still trying to figure out. Was it, as noted above, a subtle and profound curatorial comment on the terrible contradictions of these parallel exhibitions? Or was it simply a sign of cluelessness to celebrate Stein the shameless self-promoter and collaborator directly upstairs from the desperate creation of a victim of those she was collaborating with?

Crisis, experience teaches, tends to bring out people’s true character. Knowing her days were likely numbered, from 1941 to 1943 Charlotte Salomon threw herself feverishly into painting and writing an artistic record of her life. As a Jewish woman she understood her prospects were bleak, yet rather than despair and follow her mother and grandmother into self-destruction, she embarked on the path of creation and

managed to leave an extraordinary testimony of her difficult existence. Under such depressing circumstances this strikes me as a remarkably courageous course of action. It does not, as the cliché has it, reveal “the triumph of the human spirit”—quite the contrary, her spirit was brutally exterminated—but it does show that a human being can summon the gumption to go down fighting for life in the form of a deathless work of art. In such disheartening conditions I wonder whether I could have risen to the occasion with such creative aplomb.

Stein, in her way, also revealed her character during the war. Her choice was to preserve her privilege (unlike such non-Jewish intellectuals as Beckett and Camus who worked in support of the Resistance) in order not only to live in comfort but to promote her esthetic program. A lifelong conservative Republican, she apparently had no serious problem accommodating herself to a fascist French government in the interest of staying alive and furthering her cause of literary and artistic experimentation. Her commitment to her own genius and creative agenda overrode whatever moral qualms she may or may not have had about the Holocaust in progress all around her. Perhaps she was oblivious or willfully ignorant of the ambient atrocities—and who knows to what lengths people will be driven in their instinct for self-preservation—but there is something exceedingly creepy about her cultivation of her own importance in a such a horrendous historical setting.

That the Contemporary Jewish Museum, of all places, should avoid these questions completely strikes me as nothing less than obscene.

But such are the politics of cultural celebrity—and of marketing. To raise such questions in public (if indeed they were

privately discussed or debated among the curators) would have utterly changed the tone and poisoned the atmosphere of self-congratulation permeating the Stein exhibition, all the more so in light of Charlotte Salomon's fate.

Equally revealing of the compound ironies embodied by these simultaneous shows was the fact that, on the Friday afternoon when I saw them both, the galleries of the Salomon exhibit were all but empty—affording me the chance to contemplate the art with virtually no distraction, pausing before the artist's pages long enough to absorb their unspeakably sad beauty—while upstairs the Stein show was swarming with voyeurs, just as Gertrude would have wished. She self-fulfillingly prophesied her own immortality, and indeed in this exhibition her particular brand of highbrow exhibitionism reached its apotheosis. She herself, or her enduring afterimage, had become the indestructible artifact. Her writings, patronage and collecting, it seems, were merely means to an end: the creation of her own towering legend.

Stein died at age seventy-two in 1946, and so did not live to witness our current culture of competitive celebrity, but I expect she would have felt fully at home in our multimedia spectacle of personality and taken advantage of every chance to advance her personal fame. Charlotte Salomon, like some geeky graphic novelist or librettist or mixed-media artist, would likely also have made some modest mark in our cultural landscape. But the contrast between these artists' destinies, the triumph of one's indomitable will in the afterlife and the relative obscurity of the other—even though her snuffed-out gifts showed enormous accomplishment and promise—is something I find very hard to accept.



## Lorca Rorschachs

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[2010]

With the possible exception of Pablo Neruda, who lived nearly twice as long and wrote accordingly that much more, Federico García Lorca is the Spanish-language poet most frequently translated into English. Unlike Neruda, whose voice can often be brought across fairly credibly into a North American idiom, Lorca's poetry is more resistant as an object of translation, harder to "get" as persuasive poetry in English. Partly for this reason, US translators continue year after year to attempt, with varying degrees of success and failure, new versions of Lorca.

There's an amusing anecdote in Neruda's memoirs about the Chilean poet's meeting with his Andalusian counterpart in 1933 in Buenos Aires. According to Neruda (not always a reliable narrator), one evening they were reciting poems to each other when Lorca, listening to Neruda's verse, suddenly climbed into a tree, put his hands over his ears and exclaimed, "Stop! Stop! You're influencing me!"

At the time, both were engaged in experiments with what is commonly called "Spanish surrealism"—Neruda in his *Res-*

*idencia en la tierra* books and Lorca in his *Poeta en Nueva York*—a compositional process (current theorists would call it a “strategy”) drawing on subconscious images and intuitive musical associations that at best create surprising and revelatory juxtapositions, often dream- or nightmare-like in their sense of weirdness, mystery, ambiguity or horror. This approach to the surreal had less to do with André Breton and his rational dogma of the irrational than with the sixteenth-century prototype of Luis de Góngora (patron saint of Spain’s Generation of 1927, of which García Lorca was a key member), the modernist-baroque example of Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, Freudian ideas of the unconscious, Joyce’s stream-of-consciousness technique in *Ulysses*, and the technological and perceptual revelations of the dawning art of cinema. The 1920s in Spain and much of Latin America were a phenomenally fertile time for poetic experimentation, and Lorca and Neruda were among the more notable experimenters.

By the late 1950s and 60s in the United States, translations of both these poets were beginning to appear and their styles beginning to insinuate themselves into the consciousness and practice of US poets in search of alternatives to the prevailing modernist models of Eliot, Pound, Auden and Stevens, on one hand, and the more conservative formalist modes of Tate, Winters, Ransom and Lowell on the other. The Beat, Black Mountain and New York Schools of Donald Allen’s seminal anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* were already active and visible but well outside any existing mainstream at the time. Into these fertile fields of avant-garde poetic practice the voice of Lorca especially (as interpreted by his translators) fell like invigorating rain.

The impact of Lorca—or more precisely translations of

Lorca—on mid- to late-twentieth century US poets is the subject of Jonathan Mayhew's insightfully provocative and original cultural-critical essay *Apocryphal Lorca: Translation, Parody, Kitsch*. Mayhew examines the translation and appropriation of Lorca by an interesting range of Americans, from Langston Hughes through Ben Belitt to Robert Duncan, Robert Kelly, Robert Creeley, Robert Bly, Bob Kaufman, Jerome Rothenberg, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Spicer, Paul Blackburn, Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, among others, perceptively analyzing the ways in which these writers (many of them unable to read the original) used Lorca as a point of departure for English versions of various styles and fidelities, and for inspiration and application to their own diverse poetics.

One question Mayhew addresses only glancingly, though it comes up several times in different contexts, is: Why Lorca almost exclusively, instead of other Spanish (or Latin American) contemporaries? Lorca is surely an extraordinary poet, but he happened to come of age as one of a brilliant cohort that included such comparably gifted and accomplished writers as Rafael Alberti, Vicente Aleixandre, Luis Cernuda, Jorge Guillén and Pedro Salinas, any one of whom can be said to be not only in the same league as Lorca but of equal stature. The obvious answer is that Lorca was executed by fascist forces in 1936 at age thirty-eight in the opening days of the Spanish Civil War. Emblematic martyr of the Spanish Republic and of the crushed promise of its progressive culture, Lorca is mourned not only for his prematurely extinguished creative talent but as a symbol of admired political values. For some American poets, the fact that he was also openly gay has only enhanced his allure.

Lorca's dramatic and tragic death, along with his legend-



ary personality, his social energy and his cultural activism (he organized a touring theater company to bring the classics of Spanish drama to the provinces)—that is, his biography—has as much to do as his poetry with his elevation to such a disproportionately exalted position among his peers. When one takes a close look at his poems, and the ways they have been converted into English, one begins to realize there is both more and less to “Lorca” than meets the eye.

There is in Lorca’s verse, from the early folkloric songs and ballads of his native Andalusia through the open-form “surrealism” of *Poet in New York* to the Orientalist lyrics of his final book, *Diván del Tamarit*, a truly unique and unreproducible sound—what W. S. Merwin, in his Introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of New Directions’ 1955 *Selected Poems*, calls “the fire, the beat and snap and dance” of Lorca’s language. His style is characterized by a highly distinctive set of rhythms, tones and musical moves that continue to defy adequate English translation. As much as a more deeply radical poet like Vallejo, I would argue, Lorca is “untranslatable”—and surely that’s one explanation for the proliferation of Lorca versions by American poets and translators: the less translatable the original, especially when its power can be sensed even in weak translations, the more people are likely to try their hand at catching that elusive *something*.

I had to laugh a couple of years ago when I read on the back of the latest version of *Poet in New York* (by Pablo Medina and Mark Statman) John Ashbery’s gushing blurb declaring this “the definitive version of Lorca’s masterpiece, in language that is as alive and molten today as was the original in 1930.” With all respect to Medina and Statman, who have contributed a

useful addition to our cumulative reading of Lorca, Ashbery surely knows that no translation, least of all one of as singular a voice as Lorca's, is definitive. This sort of bad faith is a blatant example of promotional hype overriding critical integrity—typical perhaps, but unfair to less-sophisticated readers who may think, well, if John Ashbery says so, it must be true.

The truth is there is a Lorca industry devoted to exploiting his legend with the primary motive of selling books more than of advancing our exposure to and appreciation of the greatest poetry in Spanish. Mayhew, a scholar of more recent peninsular poetry, observes acutely that there is virtually no interest among US poets and publishers in post-Lorca Spanish poets. I would add that even among the poets of Lorca's generation, many of whom by now have been translated into English (not always with consummate skill or success, but some of them very well), none has received anywhere near the attention that Lorca has, and it isn't on account of any deficiency in their writing.

Like Frida Kahlo, a perfectly good painter turned into a marketing gimmick for t-shirts, coffee mugs and other kitschy tchotchkes, García Lorca—as Mayhew demonstrates—has been diminished and caricatured through his conversion into a domestic American icon, reduced to a *duende*-driven folksy Gypsy Negrophilic primitive hipster gay surrealist whom various factions and individuals jump to exploit at their convenience for their own sectarian and personal purposes. Lorca the actual poet and his work, meanwhile, remain unplumbed even as they are appropriated tirelessly by their admirers. While I was reading Mayhew's book a journal arrived in the mail, the *Coe Review*, a student-edited publication from Coe College in Iowa, which included a poem by Lyn Lifshin—a prolific small-press poet

published widely over the last four decades—called “Sleeping with Lorca,” which begins: “It’s not true, he never chose women. / I ought to know. It was Grenada [sic] and / the sun falling behind the Alhambra was / flaming lava...” The poem goes on to recycle “green I want you green” and “5 o’clock in the afternoon” and various other now-cliché *Lorquismos* including “gored bull” metaphors for sex, as if to illustrate the half-baked stereotypical Lorca exploitation Mayhew spends much of his book exposing, and which, as Lifshin proves, continues.

The irony is that Lorca himself, for much of his brief career, adopted the persona of what Borges called, on seeing him in Buenos Aires where he delivered his famous lecture on the *duende*, “a professional Andalusian.” His friends Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí titled their groundbreaking surrealist poem-film *An Andalusian Dog* as an inside joke on Lorca, who due to his winning personality and versatile genius was something of a legend even in his own time.

Writing from exile in Mexico some twenty-five years after Lorca’s death, Luis Cernuda addresses his old friend in a poem called “Otra vez, con sentimiento” (“Once More, with Feeling”); he recounts the way one contemporary critic laid claim to Lorca by calling him “my prince.” The poem concludes:

*The appropriation of you, which you wanted  
Nothing to do with when you were alive,  
Is what now seems to me so utterly strange.  
The prince of a toad? Isn’t it enough  
For your countrymen to have killed you?  
And now stupidity succeeds the crime.*

[my translation]

Cernuda was objecting, in the early 1960s—the same time interest in Lorca was first peaking in the US—to the exploitation of Lorca’s image and memory by Spanish poets and critics who remained in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship, and to the “appropriation” of Lorca’s angelic aura for their own self-aggrandizement. If not all American poets and/or translators have been quite so shameless in their use and abuse of Lorca, Mayhew shows convincingly the various ways in which each individual US writer has recreated the Spaniard (whether in translation or in their original poems) in his own image. If a book is a mirror, as Auden said, then Lorca’s writings are a Rorschach test.

Mayhew is especially hard on Belitt and Bly for their early and influential crimes against Lorca’s original Spanish. Belitt’s infamously incomprehensible embellishments of Lorca’s already complex yet powerful New York poems, and Bly’s flattening of Lorca’s style into a prosy middle-American vernacular, are taken apart by Mayhew with keen intelligence and a verve driven by personal indignation. While more respectful than Bly ever was in attacking his contemporaries, Mayhew pulls no punches in declaring the “vandalism” and damage done to Lorca and his readers by the likes of Bly and Belitt.

While there is surely justification for this critical judgment, both Bly and Belitt, each in his way, at least brought Lorca to greater public attention, so that others (provided they could read the Spanish) might look more closely at the originals and arrive at their own readings. While Bly’s polemical cheerleading for “leaping poetry” unfortunately leaked into creative writing programs everywhere and infected countless MFAs with cheap “deep-image”-ry, by making such a spectacle of himself as a Lorca promoter Bly opened a number of interesting arguments

about American poetry, arguments that are still going on, and of which Mayhew's excellent book is an example.

Belitt, for his part, despite his egregious violations of Lorca's verse, did *in principle* set an example for the only promising approach to Lorca translation: not an obedient adherence to the letter of the original but a re-creation of it in somehow analogous terms. While it's true that Belitt failed spectacularly to create an English comparable to Lorca's Spanish, he demonstrated—for those perceptive enough to notice—that this is *conceptually* the only method that might yield, in the hands of an imaginative and technically skilled enough poet/translator, something like the experience of the original.

In the most illuminating chapters of *Apocryphal Lorca*, the ones on Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, Mayhew shows how these two New York poets, neither of whom read Spanish and both of whom were in fact more Francophile in their literary tastes, adapted Lorca somewhat irreverently, via a certain campiness in O'Hara's case and in Koch's by very witty parody, in truly creative transformations that in some essential way are truer to the spirit of Lorca than the thrift-shop spirituality of the *duende*-invokers or the fatuousness of the romantic swooners over Lorca's Gypsy soul.

While Koch, in his delightful Borgesian "Some South American Poets," dazzlingly caricatures the mystification of Hispanic poetry in US culture of the 1960s, his good-natured tone reveals that he is not ridiculing the originals but slyly critiquing the naïveté of their North American adaptors. Koch's very funny and inventive parodies are actually a greater homage to Lorca than many more earnest tributes by Koch's contemporaries. This is one of Mayhew's most astute and useful insights.

For me, however, Mayhew's identification of Frank O'Hara as perhaps the truest American avatar of Lorca—not so much in the poetry itself as in their “kinship” as charismatic, mercurial, gay, jazz-infused, risk-taking, elegiac, prematurely mortal personalities each at the center of a vibrant creative scene—is one of his shrewdest observations. This kind of intuitive leap makes for the liveliest and riskiest criticism. One of Mayhew's strengths is that he's not afraid to be wrong; he has a distinct point of view and acknowledges his personal angle of vision. For all his deeply felt conviction, he makes no Harold Bloomian or Helen Vendleroid pronouncements from the peak of Parnassus. His style is refreshingly free of intellectual pomposity or jargon. Not least important, for someone interested as I am in the subject, his book is fun to read.

My one complaint about *Apocryphal Lorca* is its unfortunately numerous annoying typos and copyediting errors, little grammatical and lexical glitches that slipped through the editors' spell-check programs and past the eyes of their proofreaders. (The poet A. R. Ammons, for example, is referred to as “A. A. Ammons,” and in the title of the famous James Wright poem “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota,” the word “at” is mistakenly replaced by “in.” Minor though such errors may be, one wouldn't expect them of a university press, especially one as distinguished as Chicago.) Such imperfections mar an otherwise exemplary work of creative literary and cultural criticism. Perhaps they will be fixed in future editions.