

NICK DISPOLDO, SMALL PRESS REVIEW (ON “CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING”)

Sinclair Lewis was fond of saying that college professors liked their literature “cold and dead.” That seems like a safe generalization when i consider the cargoloads of vacuous vomit that spews from most university presses.

Sinclair Lewis would read Janet Kuypers. “Striking” is a collection of poetry, essays, letters and diary entries. Like Sylvia Plath, Kuypers has a sense of existential rage but, unlike Plath, her rage is more incisive and focused. She is concerned with problems, whether societal or internal, and “...the violence that often stems from them.” Pablo Neruda claims “literature must have a duty toward life” and Kuypers undoubtedly believes this. “Violence” - aside from the obvious forms that fill our streets, homes, movies and television - may even be subtle.

Isolation and loneliness are recurrent Kuypers themes and, again like Plath, she is both appalled and preoccupied with suicide: suicide as the ultimate antidote for the diseases of modern society. She creates marvelous if gruesome imagery in her “Hancock Suicide, Chicago, 1994.” A handicapped woman throws herself out of a fiftieth floor window of the Hancock building in Chicago and lands near a construction worker who is on a break.

Kuypers is clever and clear and her book is indeed a bargain.

JASON PETTUS, FREELANCE WRITER (ON “CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING”)

I am 64 pages into “Close Cover...” right now (just finished the “Knowing Your Neighbors” essay). The things I like the best so far in the book are the little stories, the things about day-to-day life that don't seem to have any neat wrap-up at the end. My two favorite pieces so far are pieces like these -- “Phone Calls from Brian Tolle” and “Seeing Things Differently.”

I can't tell which pieces (Kuypers is) writing in her own voice from her own experiences, and which ones are fictional accounts but written in first-person. I usually am a big fan of this (I write a lot of stuff that way, too); for some reason her stuff makes me feel really uncomfortable (I mean, in a good way). I think it's that she writes a lot about these loose edges in behavior, these weird shades of grey that otherwise upstanding, decent, try-to-do-the-right-thing people have.

It's the strange result of reading confessional work of someone you don't know and who isn't famous enough to have all their skeletons hanging in full public view (i.e. Anne Sexton). I should reiterate, I LIKE that. The effect is a very engaging one.

THE REMAINS
Close Cover Before Striking

close cover before **Striking**

a book of poetry, prose, political essays, art work and philosophical rants by janet kuypers

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Second (Stripped) Edition

introduction

There's a kind of book in America that is turned out by our college and university writing programs; they tend to be cool, detached, slick, middle class and boring. This is not any such book. Janet Kuypers is rooted in quite a different world: the scene of the streets, late-night bars, the prisons (now our only true growth industry), and the kitchens of homes where people live, argue with each other, and sometimes try to stay in love.

Reading these poems and stories, I was reminded of Sherwood Anderson's statement that the Americans are the loneliest people in the world. Janet sees this also, and how could it be otherwise in a society pivoting on the doctrine of Individualism? Like Anderson, Kuypers' people seethe with anxiety, despair, conflict, and a desire to escape without any real place to go, but also with a terrible yearning that amounts to love, which is the only hope. Her earlier work focused on themes of abuse: alcoholism, rape, and that daily harassment we find in our lives and work. The women's movement has brought forward a great truth-telling literature of this kind, exposing the horrors of a patriarchal system which was worse because it seemed so strongly entrenched that it could not be challenged, let alone overcome.

In a preface to one of those earlier collections, Kuypers relates that people used to inquire if she was disturbed in some way, as if in revealing all this chaotic torment, she must be crazy or at least neurotic. This is an old suggestion about writers who tell the truth, going back to William Blake, the surrealists, and so on. She rightly protested in defense of her mission, to take the side of the outcasts, the beaten, the destroyed.

By this point in our history, even the "mainline" magazines and newspapers talk about the crisis of American society, the turmoil, crime, corruption and brutality we feel we cannot face, but must face. As in previous books, Janet deals with that, but now I discern a new element in her writing, to quietly but resolutely move toward solutions. The section of poems for and about her mother finds grounds for sense and humor and calm, as if writing of such a resilient woman induces a healing perspective. The essays about pornography are reflective and full of insights into how commercialism infects the most personal relations in our lives. Buying and selling and being powerful is so common in our society that many do not even question what it is, or what it does.

I am struck by how the present collection of work strives to forge new ways of

thinking; indeed, there is often a modest but steady insistence that thinking as such is necessary and will help us through it all. Kuypers has no belief in the easy solutions of the churches; she must find her way forward with purely human means. Yet her writing has that quality of intensity and purpose which is generally but falsely attributed to the “spiritual.” In “The State of the Nation” she communes with our revolutionary ancestors, about what is happening in America. She reinvigorates the language of rights, of democracy, of a future for the continent in spite of degradation and decay. Finally, in “Everything Was Alive and Dying” she confronts head-on the fate of nature herself, in a poem which I find to be one of the great sustaining visions of our decades on earth.

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda has an essay in which he says literature must have a “duty toward life.” This is a book that undertakes that same responsibility; it’s hard-won, by turns painful, bitter, harsh, but loving and fighting too. We should be proud to have it, by our side, as we take on the thousand challenges of staying alive when so much is aiming at death.

Fred Whitehead

BEN OHMART, WRITER

I'm currently reading the great book ("Close Cover Before Striking"). It's fantastic. Best \$10 I've ever spent.

BRIAN SELERSKI (ON THE POEM "I WANT LOVE")

I read (Kuypers') poem "i want love" and found that I could relate to the feelings that she expressed. She made the poem so simple, but complex in text meaning that it is simply worded but it has a lot of meaning and feeling behind it.

JIM MADDOCKS, GLASGOW

(ON THE POEM "CHICAGO, WEST SIDE")

When I first read CHICAGO, WEST SIDE I wasn't that crazy about it. It was only on closer investigation that it began to grow on me. It is evocative. Actually it was one word that changed my mind about the whole piece: this! as in "this time, when she heard the sirens..." So, did she kill her abusive husband? Whatever she did, it seems she was still able to make a cup of coffee after, such a domesticated thing to do. In fact, the whole opening image is quite excellent, very well constructed. So how many times have the neighbours called the cops?

EVAN ADAMS

(ON "HANCOCK SUICIDE, CHICAGO, DECEMBER 1994")

Wow, this poem is very good. I like how vivid you made the scene and graphic too.

GUY, EDITOR, HIPNOSIS MAGAZINE

I loved (Kuypers') work.....Its so refreshing.....so many pieces I receive to look at are so formatted and such, and hers is so rich and from the soul.... I especially loved the one (some people want to believe) about being vegetarian (I'm an ovo-lacto also) - this is a conversation I had with someone as well.....very enlightening to know that others suffer my fate.... I really loved them all....

RICHARD DAVID HOUFF, EDITOR,

PARIAH PRESS/HEELTAP REVIEW

(Kuypers') poem "taking out the brain" rings true... The homeless are often viewed as mentally ill, lazy, etc. The government hype and media have done a good job impregnating the collective mindset of amerika. At any rate, that's one fine poem - send it and others of a similar nature across the planet.

PACKING

there are too many times
when i've said this before

never thought i'd really leave you
and now i sit here

in this apartment
popcorn bowl on the cocktail table

eleven thirty at night
the television playing static

it looks too clean in here,
not lived in

so i decide to take a trip
get out of this place

into the bedroom, time to start
packing: two dresses, two

pairs of shorts, shirts, loneliness,
anger, make-up, extra socks

it's amazing how much of your life
you can fit in a single suitcase

hancock suicide, chicago,
december 1994

so me and the guys
were just taking a break
from the construction

on the hancock building.
you know they've been
doing construction work

there, right? they put
that big wall up around
the block, the tall

fence, and they've been
doing remodeling stuff.
well, i had been working

on some tile work and
we were just walking
around the building, me

and three other guys,
walking kind of like a
square, in formation,

sort of, and i'm at the
back and i stop and step
back to check some of

the grout work, so i just
kind of lean back while
standing still. well, one

of the guys says he heard
it coming, like a big rush
of air, like a whistling

sound, but much heavier.
i didn't even get a chance
to look up, though one of

the other guys did and
saw it coming a split second
before it happened. and the

next thing i knew there was
this loud cracking sound
and i felt all of this stuff

hit me, like wet concrete
thrown at me, but i didn't
know what the hell it was.

and i opened my eyes and looked
down and i was just completely
covered in blood

and there was just this
heap of mass right in front of
me. it took a while for me

to realize that a woman jumped.
she hit the fence, her head
and spinal cord were still

stuck on the fence and the
rest of her was just this red
pile right in front of me.

the police had to take all of
my clothes. every inch.
they say she broke through the

glass at the fiftieth floor, i don't
know how, that glass is supposed
to be bullet proof or something.

and the one thing i noticed was
that she covered her head with
panty hose, in an effort to keep

her face together. funny, she
was so willing to die, but she
wanted to be kept in tact. i know

i won't hear about this on the
news, they try to downplay suicides,
but other violence is fine for them.

and they say she was handi-
capped, but then how badly, and
how did she get the strength

to break the window and throw
herself out of the john hancock
building? she must have really

wanted to die.

it really hasn't sunk in quite yet,
seeing her fall apart in front
of me like that. i don't think i'm

ready to think about it yet.

helping men in public places

so it was new year's eve
and we were standing on
forty-second street and

the avenue of the americas
we were a few blocks away
but we had just the right

view of times square. and
yes, there was freezing rain
but i didn't really care, since

i was just in new york for
a few days. it was 10:55, we
still had a long time to wait

standing with i don't know
how many thousands of other
people, some of them were

climbing up the light poles,
all of us pushing forward
into the street, despite the

police officers on horseback
rushing at us back toward
the sidewalk. and our paper

bag fell apart in the rain, so
i let the glass water bottle fall
to the curb, and our friend told

us he needed to go to the
bathroom real bad, you know,
so i told him to go right here

in the street, no one will see
him. but he didn't want to
piss on someone's shoes, so

he asked if i had a bottle, so i
picked up the water bottle from
the curb, and when he finished

his job he closed up the bottle
and put it back on the sidewalk.
god, and you, too, getting on

the train after the ball dropped,
more rain and a bottle of
champagne later, saying you had

to go real bad, too, so i pulled
an empty beer bottle from my
coat pocket, you covered the train

window with your coat and i
blocked your view from the aisle
while you took care of the

matter at hand. i'm amazed that
that bottle didn't tip over on the
train floor during that hour

commute, our first of the new
year, while i slept on your
shoulder. and i'm amazed that

i ended one year and began
another helping men i know,
in public places, piss into bottles.

squid

once i was sitting in the living room,
i just got home from school, and i
said i need to go wash my hands. so i
walked upstairs, went over to the
kitchen sink. mom, sitting in the living
room, didn't mention that the sink
was half-full of raw squid for her dinner.
I shriek. mom laughs.
"are their beady little eyes looking
up at you?" she asked.
the little devil. i'm upstairs, in the
kitchen, shrieking, and she's laughing.
it is kind of funny, looking back.

singular
memories

precinct fourteen

it was a long night for us, starting out
at your apartment with your roommate's
coworkers coming over and making
margaritas until two in the morning,
but of course we then decided that the
best thing to do would be to go out

and so off to the blue note we went,
found some interesting people to talk
to, closed the bar, i think that was the
first time i ever did that, closed a late-
night bar, i mean, and at four-thirty you
drove me home down milwaukee ave

and i know it angles, and you can see
the traffic light for oncoming traffic
as easily as you can see your own light,
but i'm sure the light was green, and not
red like the cops said, when they pulled
you over. you could have been in big

trouble that night, no insurance, no city
registration sticker, a michigan driver's
license when you'd lived in illinois for
over a year now, a cracked windshield,
running a red light, probably intoxicated.
so they brought us to the station at five a.m.,

and all they did was write you a ticket,
and they gave me a business card, said if we
had any problems to give them a call.
you drove me home, and the cops met
us there, too, hitting on me again, and
although we both agreed that the night

was a lot of fun, even with the involvement
of the fourteenth precinct, i still believe
that damn light wasn't even red.

domestic violence in america
nashville, tennessee

i have had my cheek bone
and nose reconstructed twice

we're divorced now
but he still keeps calling me

he keeps denying it in court

violence
in america

too far

When he met me
he told me
I looked like
Kim Basinger
long blonde locks
but as time
wore on I knew
I wasn't her
and I could never
be her and I was
never good enough
thin enough
pretty enough
I got a perm
straightened my
teeth
bought a wonder
bra but it wasn't
doing the trick
I bought slimfast
used the stair
stepper ate rice
cakes and wheat
germ but I wasn't
thin enough I
only dropped
twenty pounds

so I went to the
spa got my skin
peeled soaked
myself in mud
wrapped myself
in cellophane
bought the amino
acid facial creams
but I knew they
didn't really
work so I went to
the doctor got my
nose slimmed
my tummy stapled
my thighs sucked

thought about
getting a rib or two
removed
like Cher
but I figured
they've got to
be there for
something
and hey, that's
just going
too far

the carpet factory, the shoes

i heard a story today
about a little boy
one of many who was enslaved
by his country
in child labor

in this case
he was working
for a carpet factory

he managed to escape
he told his story
to the world
he was a hero at ten

but the people from the factory
held a grudge
and today i heard
that the little boy
was shot and killed
on the street
he was twelve

and eugene complains to me
when i buy shoes
that are made in china

now i have to think
did somebody
have to die for these

will somebody have to die
for these