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A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon: New (Soma)tics



Synopsis

"He's a poet for our time like Ginsberg was for his."Eileen Myles"Conrad's work shows us that the body itself is the first source of alienation and estrangement from the self, and is thus the true subject of poetry. Only by engaging this body . . . can we achieve transport."BookforumWhat is the best Love you've ever had in this world? Be quiet while thinking about that Love. If someone comes along and starts talking, quietly shoo them away, you're busy, you're a poet with a penny in your mouth. . . . Now get your pen and paper and write about POVERTY, write line after line about starvation and deprivation from the voice of one who has been Loved in this world.CAConrad's (Soma)tic exercises desire to literally crack open existence as we know it. A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon is an essential how-to book for anyone interested in breaking through their perceived limitations to become a more politically and physically engaged writer. Incorporating unorthodox steps in the writing process, these twenty-seven exercises and their corresponding poems confirm Conrad's unwavering belief in poetry as a necessary practice for being.CAConrad, a 2011 PEW Fellow in the Arts, is the author of five books of poetry, including *The Book of Frank* (Wave Books, 2010/Chax Press, 2009). He lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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Customer Reviews

CAConrad is the author of *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon*, *The Book of Frank*, *Advanced Elvis Course*, (Soma)tic Midge, Deviant Propulsion, and a collaboration with poet Frank Sherlock titled *The City Real & Imagined*. The son of white trash asphyxiation, his childhood included selling cut flowers along the highway for his mother and helping her shoplift.

Love, love, love this. Has totally expanding my mind and what is possible through writing. Conrad, you are a beautiful genius.

There is no one in the world like CA Conrad. Lovely. Funny. Present- ever present.

The work, "A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon" by CAConrad was definitely one of the more challenging books I have read. For a good deal of the poems I found myself struggling to connect with Conrad's work, either due to a lack of experience with his writing style or with his subject manner (I am not sure). Despite the challenges that this book presented to me when I was reading it, I enjoyed the places that I felt Conrad was trying to take me, because many of them were spaces that I have yet to explore or even discover. On this vein of thought, in reading the (soma)tic prompts of Conrad there were many times that I felt almost on the cusp of learning some powerful secrets as his exercises could most certainly take any one to a place that is both deeply inside and outside of body. Interestingly, I was sometimes resistant to take this journey with Conrad, afraid of being taken to a powerful place that is so alien to me, but that comes from myself. One such example of this was (soma)tic 4, where Conrad calls the reader to recognize inhibition, record it, and respond to it. Immediately upon reading this, I imagined myself in this situation and found that I promptly had to stop for fear of the feeling looming inside of me, an actual disgust for the person I might be underneath a thin sheen of restraint. My response startled me; a cringe that started from my heart and traveled to my toes (instead of starting in my toes as he called for). This very visceral reaction is awe-inspiring and extremely powerful in a way that I have not often encountered before in writing. For leading me to a place such as this, I cannot help but thank Conrad for this experience. One of my favorite moments in this book is on page 2, in the paragraph headed, "It's ALL collaboration." To me, this almost perfectly captures my view of Conrad's writing in this work, as he attempts to manipulate the world around him so that he has a new stream of influence, or else so that he can influence someone else. There is great deal of power in his acknowledgement of an inability to remove oneself from influence and even more power as well as beauty in his total immersion of such influences.

This book is definitely an interesting surprise. Not what I was expecting from a poetry book. But in an odd way, this process used by CAConrad makes complete sense to me. Allowing the body to

freely and openly react to these exercises would surely generate some type of response in anyone, and naturally this response could form a poem. CAConrad's idea to make this book of exercises and his own poems was very gutsy, yet seems to make total sense. While his poems are different from what any other person's would be, it is cool to see that he did all these exercises himself, and showed the results. My favorite exercise overall was #7, "Feast of the Seven Colors." The food color made sense, but the ways in which he surrounded himself with each color were very out of the box to me, which made it fun to read. While his poems were very sprawling, I could actually see some of each color. In "distorted torque of FLORA's red" (p. 28), CAConrad talks about "Italian seasoning on Chinese food," an execution, and a Christmas card. While I may just be making this up, in all the color poems I could see very vague and subtle references to the color of topic. One of my favorite lines of the book is "I'm not afraid of my insanity just my growing inability to hide it" (CAConrad p. 46) from "rehab saved his life but drugs saved mine at the blue HOUR". Also, a cool title. I think it's pretty common that people don't address their problems until other people start to notice them. And in the purple poem, "My neighbor killed himself where my new neighbor undresses every morning for her shower" (p. 50), is very jarring, but calm. CAConrad's writing is very frank and matter-of-fact to me. His writing is very all over the place, but his words make sense.

How are we worthy of CAConrad? I don't even know how -- it was probably a mistake at some divine post office -- but I'm glad for the mix-up. This book tows the line between self-help, philosophy, and a really intense cookbook. There are twenty-some poetry writing exercises. Some are as simple as finding an unobtrusive place to observe people and then writing about them. Others are more immersive, such as centering one's existence entirely on one color. And then, of course, the writing part, seeing what poems come out. Also included are the results of CAC's own exercises, which give the book a whole new dimension. It's a thick book (it's also huge, two or three times as tall as a normal slim volume of verse), yet it never feels too heavy -- the poems take up pages, it's all really nicely laid out, and all the space feels fun, like when you open your journal to a new double-page spread and go wild all over it. Part of the joy of this book is reading about CAC's own experiences, which we can only assume are autobiographical, as he meditates docilely in the middle of a parking lot and tries to commune with its other inhabitants. Part of the fun is using this as a kick-in-the-butt to start doing these sort of things yourself. It's a kick we all need. Every home in America should own a copy of this.

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