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## Dream-Work by Kirby Congdon

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## BOOK REVIEW

**DREAM-WORK.** By Kirby Congdon. Cycle Press. Paperback. 64 pages. \$2.00

Kirby Congdon explores those reaches of reality that reveal themselves when you close your eyes. Dream realities? Yes.

Dreams are natural poems already. We dream in symbols. The best poems are pictures of truth & reality drawn in the paint of symbolism. Like dreams. In poetry we sometimes see a *reality* that is harder to grasp when seen through 'wakeful' eyes. Reading DREAM-WORK is like that.

Way back when the English were still writing original poetry, the term *to die* meant *to fuck*. (John Donne did it.) Dwell for a moment on this definition. Every time you attempt reproduction you are dying. It's not the loss of fluid — no — you can make more of that stuff — it's *time* that moves you toward death no matter what you do. Sex is not a regenerating force, because rather than stopping the process of death, it speeds it on. (I suppose that in this sense you are dying all the time. It's just more obvious when you're fucking.)

Congdon uses this point of view to great effectiveness. The basic symbol as the book begins is one of the motorcycle death rider. The motorcycle (a *perfect* word to describe the process) is the symbol of the phallus, rushing its rider toward certain death.

As the dreams progress, the cycle becomes more than just a sexual symbol. It takes on sociological, religious & political identity. It becomes the central image of a book that protests death as a way of American life.

After a run, we all meet at the Club-those of us who haven't broken down, dropped their bikes, or gotten hurt, injured or killed. We play pool and drink, and move in even strides about the room, showing off the thick backs of our curving thighs, gleaming where the black leather stretches tight. (from THE MOTORCYCLE SOCIAL CLUB)

It becomes a dilemma. Life in the face of death. The suicide riders become dancers in a fascinating but horrible dance. There is a very strong dance-aspect in the book. Each suicide becomes a ritual act, like a dance or a poem. They are often lyric & fantastic death leaps & beautiful crashes:

Then he rammed the car and himself into the brick wall with such force, both man and vehicle seemed to crumble into a ragged and jagged flower unfolding and separating against the sky.

(from THE RACERS)

They become the only honorable response to an America where death is calmly accepted as A WAY OF LIVING.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is a strong religious level. The sound effect is like a scream, registering slightly above the level of Ginsberg's now-famous HOWL. Congdon begins the book with:

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?

There was no reply.

He continues:

It was a beautiful day, filled with love. It was holy and the people in it seemed, all of them, to be saints. And the dying and the dead-martyrs whom he alone had blessed and whose transfiguration he alone had witnessed, and whose meaninglessness he alone knew-had more meaning than existence itself-an existence which was the fulfillment of life into the very extremes of its far-flung boundaries, which are those far-off yet so close frontiers of death.

(from JAGANNATH)

There are suicides. One feels that religion itself is a form of suicide: a celebration of

death. Christ's death: another suicide: an impotency. The 'hereafter': life lived for death, as with some sad old bible-belt lady, being 'good' so she can 'get her reward in heaven'.

\* \* \* \* \*

A stronger yet political & social level.  
America: LAND OF HOPELESS DEPENDENCE ON DEATH:

In the land of plenty, death grows, fertilized and lush. And we get drunk on the habit-forming perfumes of its secret and majestic, its black and addictive blooms, and each flower broken off seeds a glittering shower of hard new seeds.

(from THE MOTORCYCLE SOCIAL CLUB)

The image of the racers, who speed around the track only to crash into the brick wall at the end reminds me of my own dreams & secret thoughts about America. Land of speed & brick walls. Crash.

\* \* \* \* \*

DREAM-WORK gains much of its power from its symbolism: you try to see it one way — another — it only becomes harder. You stop *trying* to see it through your daytime eyes. And then. Yes. The shadows form shapes. The shapes become motorcycles, spinning toward the edge of a cliff. *Who is that, grafted to the saddle like a mythological half-man/half-cycle?* The face is blurred as he takes flight, and drops.

In the last few pages, the tone becomes highly lyrical. The writing skill in these last pages is so great that it totally captivates the reader, & he & the dreamer become as one, remembering:

The scenery is beautiful but indifferent, if not hostile. We watch it, continually changing. And some of the songs we sing are beautiful. There is nothing else to do.

(from WHEN WE GOT TIRED OF CALLING)

The last prose/poem reveals the reality of dreaming, the truth of the book:

I turned my face away from the heat which was already charging the air. Even the cellar of the house seemed pathetically vulnerable. And as I turned away in the opposite direction, the chill of the northern ice was too devastating and merciless in its windless cold to be of any comfort. The one fate was quick, but painful; the other, numbing, but slow. I knew neither I nor anyone else would escape. I wished that that vision were a dream, but it is not.

(from THE DREAM)

No. Not a dream. A vision. A revelation, & a prophecy. Not just the image of a giant bomb either. Beyond that.

\* \* \* . \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

And Congdon goes beyond. He does what a real POET is supposed to do: he questions basic assumptions & ways of life. He even makes his questions into something beautiful: a work of art. I guess I can't really *review* this book. Better that you read it yourself.

If you want to read DREAM-WORK, you'll have to order it directly from the publisher, since it is a small-press book, thus not readily available in most of America. Address is: Cycle Press / 18 Warren Place / Cobble Hill / Brooklyn / New York / 11201.

This is one of the best books I've ever read. I can't *really* explain *why*, & I guess that I don't even *want to*. Real poetry is sometimes like that.

L. Eric Greinke