



BROWSE



Cumberland Station by Dave Smith (review)

Venet a Nielsen

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviews 329 Cumberland Station. By Dave Smith. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977. 94 pages, \$7.95.) One-third through Cumberland Station one is ready to say this is a thought-style, a dianopia, rare as Roethke's and Whitman's, and as greatly needed. These two poets, mentioned in his poems with reverence, have in common with Dave Smith the enormous compassion which keeps them from the solipsist vulgarity, the sly self-pity, which shuts off the valves of our attention because it betrays not true artist power but too often a vapid weakness of spirit. Read the poem about the child who on her fourth birthday, in her polio braces, was given the birthday gift of death in a nest of cotton-mouths, and you cannot close those valves. Read the title poem, "Cumberland Station." You will want to go on into the book to realize the man behind the professor. Part Two of the collection contains some prolixity, some slack tension, and one or two poems where in the language drops from powerful under statement to a bathetic exploitation of shock words one does not expect a first-order poet to need. Dave Smith does not need shock or disproportioned language or imagery and proves it. "The Testimony of Wine" is incredibly skillful. The handicaps of personification, sermon,

obvious symbolism are transcended by an unobtrusive but sure musicality in the mythopoeia.. Was it Yeats who said that what is true has its own distinctive music? Perhaps Valery, who recognized the manner in which true utterances seek their perfect vocabulary and inflections. "One Question, Two Seasons" is an elegy, and as many of the poems are elegiac whether or not they describe death, it should be read for the central theme of love which the writer does not get away from in any poem of this book. I don't care that you died, I want to keep alive the love you made good in me So who can tell me how to stop dreaming those bones charred by cold, the frame of the stripped skin the absence of eye holes? I must give over grief and begin in the winter I love to love whatever believes in the good. Closing part two is a long poem "Drunks," describing a visit to the Rehabilitation Center, subtly but surely pointing at the tragic non-communication which makes return to society impossible to some addicts. The counselor said few graduate for good. Graduate from what, you asked, but you were done and so was he. This is the kind of poetry that can only rise out of deep spiritual reserves, 330 Western American Literature telling the thought-style of the man Rousseau, if not such himself, believed we most need. A few lines from "Some Good Luck in Lightfoot," part three, will give an idea of the relationship of thought and craft. Mostly she was locked up good and he would talk as we wandered up the tiny stairs and walked through the gallery of girls she sketched on sheets and tacked to the eaves. He shook his head for the purity of what she made, although she dreamed plain: each girl wore green as she did, the rent streak of the crayon blurring into the hubs of spinning wheels always there, and legs skewed out like bad-cut boards and faces facing to a window hardly more than a butter smear. Two weeks I heard him whisper through the hole in his throat The neighbors must not know or else they'd think being crazy's just the joke the artist plays. As serious as if he'd laid a knife on a hog's throat he swore that art was the only thing that mattered in this moony world. You saw it? Didn't you see it! Upstairs she thumped her boards and drooled When I left he warned me to keep away from the James and I have done the best I can in a hundred towns where no one took me home to keep me living. You would be wrong to think I do not love the way that woman soared in shades of green...

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One-third through *Cumberland Station* one is ready to say this is a thought-style, a *dianoia*, rare as Roethke's and Whitman's, and as greatly needed. These two poets, mentioned in his poems with reverence, have in common with Dave Smith the enormous compassion which keeps them from the solipsist vulgarity, the sly self-pity, which shuts off the valves of our attention because it betrays not true artist power but too often a vapid weakness of spirit. Read the poem about the child who on her fourth birthday, in her polio braces, was given the birthday gift of death in a nest of cotton-mouths, and you cannot close those valves. Read the title poem, "Cumberland Station." You will want to go on into the book to realize the man behind the professor.

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 the love you made good in me
 So who can tell me
 how to stop dreaming those bones charred by cold,
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Cumberland Station by Dave Smith (Book Review, gyrosopic device allocates discretionary seal.

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A Gathering of Poets, the role of possible

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