

# Treat for the reader: A fascinating literary mixture of

By Andrei Codrescu

**Tiger Lilies: An American Childhood.** Fielding Dawson. Duke University Press. \$15.75.

**Fast Lanes.** Jayne Anne Phillips, with drawings by Yvonne Jacquette. Vehicle Edition (238 Mott street, New York, N.Y. 10012). No price listed.

**Peter Leroy: The Girl with the White Fur Muff.** Vol. 2, No. 2 of A Serial Novel. Eric Kraft. Applewood Books (Box 2870, Cambridge, MA 02139) \$4.95

**What the President Will Say and Do!** Madeline Gins. Station Hill (Barrington, N.Y. 12507). \$7.95.

**The Rules of Limbo.** Peter Pate. Terminal Words (537 Jones street, San Francisco, CA 94102). No price listed.

Horn of plenty or Pandora's box, the abundance of stories published today can only benefit that elusive creature the reader. All the above are fascinating in a different way and some even advance the cause of literature.

Fielding Dawson's work is of that order, with great stylistic flights of fancy moving the narrative breathlessly forward. This is a childhood recalled, not reconstructed, which begins with lovely little islands of early memories, followed by longer and longer stories as feelings become connected with words.

Dawson's telling is physical and

## Here is an intelligent meditation on language . . .

insistent, nostalgic certainly, relentlessly affectionate, seeking for a lost warmth, for the immensity and timelessness of childhood. You should try reading some of the lyrical early passages aloud. One of them, about being in mother's arms, ends with a prolonged "mmmmmm." It's an endearing and useful "mmmmmm," resonating with familiar magic. As a fan of Dawson's many other books, I find this one first rate.

Jayne Anne Phillips achieved critical and popular success with "Black Tickets," published by Delacorte, and with "Machine Dreams," a novel. Vehicle Editions and Brooke Alexander now publish her newest story in a remarkably produced book with drawings by Yvonne Jacquette, a very fine New York artist.

The story is first-rate Phillips, tough, unsparing, desperate, bitterly true. It concerns a couple of drifters in their 30s who get together to travel back home from California. She needs a ride. He drives. For a few moments, there is a promise, a glimmer, almost love. But in New Orleans something happens. After that

they become once more good members of their generation: cynical, disillusioned, correct.

When we meet the old folks and see the so-called homes they once abandoned, we see America in the harsh and brilliant light of its essential emptiness. Jayne Anne Phillips is a solid mainstream American writer in the grand tradition from Dreiser to Welty. She sees and she tells, and she makes us weep for it.

Vehicle Editions has also published **Counting**, Phillips's second book, which it has now reprinted and made available.

Applewood Books of Cambridge, Mass., is an innovative and exuberant publisher that is obviously in the business for fun. Because of it, and going against all conventional wisdom, it has been often successful, particularly with its Brand X anthologies of poetry and fiction. The Brand X books are full of wonderful

parodies of every writer in America, and a true delight.

"Peter Leroy, A Serial Novel," by Eric Kraft, is exactly that: Published four times a year, the series leisurely meanders through Peter's childhood, to eventually build (one hopes) into a wide roman-fleuve, an American bildungsroman. It is remarkable that author, and publisher, have the leisure and faith in such an enterprise in these days of fast food books and intense competition.

What's more, Peter Leroy is a delightful boy, impishly and lovingly drawn. This installment tells of his love for the Girl with the White Fur Muff. It is sometime in the mid-50s, and Peter senses something restlessly stirring as the girl strokes that white fur muff there at the beginning of adolescence and an interesting new age. I can't wait for the next installment.

Unlike the above, Madeline Gins's

## quality writing

"What the President Will Say and Do!" would be called a "text" rather than a "story." A "text" is what some critics now call books that don't fit into any known genre. The book is a collage of aphorisms and short poetic fragments. Here are some of them (keep the title in mind):

"I said 'Lower the birth age!'"

"Remove all initial letters."

"Use compass to bisect every written word."

"Enter a staircase."

Many of these are very funny, and some are profound and downright eerie. They are all "presidential" in the sense that they are edicts and only a very large power could utter them, leave alone enforce them. The book is an intelligent, meditation on language and well worth the time.

"The Rules of Limbo" is an extraordinary first book, and one that

questions both language and life, although it does not make that distinction. There is a story here, a tragic, painful urban story of a lost soul in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. This large story consists of several smaller ones, beginning in childhood and going on toward a troubled middle age.

To the extent that the story is autobiographical, we are dealing with an uncompromising sociopath, whose need for love is answered by society with mental institutions, prisons and billy clubs.

There is a splendid ear for street language, a fine minimal strength in description, good sense of city life. The disturbing cover shows a bald, oddly petrified nude man reclining on a tombstone. I hope that Pate continues to write, instead of committing suicide as his character is prone to do. It would be worth his while, and ours.

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