

A review of *Alphabet* by Andrew Simpson Guthrie
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This volume cleverly juggles with the twenty-six counters of the English alphabet to conjure up poetry. The reader hears the voice of an aspiring poet persona who persists in the creation of this literary form despite all odds. He, she, or we or they (identities shift and merge in the poems) must devise and revise, write and rewrite, as well as retrieve from memory, revisit past scenes of folly or glory, and woefully get rejected. A glance at the first few titles, all humbly in lower case letters, will reveal a poet's career through the veneer of irony, a trajectory from "files" to "manuscripts," from "rehashed manifesto" to "vanity press." Then poetry has to be promoted like any commercial product as "entertainment," in "open mic," or displayed in /on the "bookstore / book shelf." Finally though, words still get mangled in "your edit," and the injunction to "kill the poets" concludes the volume.

The pervasive irony of the volume demands from the reader a constant alertness to the layers of meaning. Thus the reading experience is enriched, and highly rewarding to one who cares about the place of poetry and the role of the poet in the modern-day world. The reader is not challenged too harshly though, for the poems are often humorous, the effect enhanced at times by a sleight of hand with rhymes. Free verse is used throughout the volume. It has a casual and improvisatory quality, as it can quickly modulate to playful rhymes, wax ostentatiously prosaic as in "grammar school," or become wistful as in "zeus."

This volume of poetry revels in antics of the mind that also spin off to wanderings in the maze of a city, thus opening up the self-reflexivity of the poems to the sights and sounds of an urban centre. In the poem, "grammar school," downtown Boston serves as the backdrop of a mad run of strange markings. New York is the setting for another poem, "lost fonts," where a novice poet locks himself up in a hotel room to write up his masterpiece while city noises and voices keep on wafting into the hotel room and into the poetry. The volume merits recognition from still another city, Hong Kong, for the readers there, as readers elsewhere, may like to enjoy deciphering the strange markings that have strayed across borders.

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