



Skid

Dean Young

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Dean Young is one of the premier surrealist poets writing today. In *Skid*, his fifth book of poems, social outrage vies with comic excess. He embraces the autobiographical urge with fury and musically lush exclamations. Whether through the dark facts of mortality or the celebratory surprises of the imagination, these poems proclaim vitality and alertness, wasting nothing. From Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner's "Meep! Meep!" to remembrances of lost loves and laments about the future, Young's poems reveal his faith in the genius of calamity and the redemptive power of fun.

Skid Details

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From Reader Review Skid for online ebook

Grant Faulkner says

Dean Young is an easy poet for me to like. His congenital, sometimes twisted, joie de vivre leaps off the page. He's a prankster, a Dadaist, a writer whose words and images juke, jab, dash, pirouette, and jump—just when you think you know where one of his poems is going, it changes course like a dare.

He's one of the few writers who can surprise with each phrase, if not each word, tossing coarseness into a highbrow thought, switching from the sanguine to the lugubrious in a snap of the fingers. He rarely settles for a single note in his poems, in fact, but allows a playful, discordant, dreamy contention of words to define his universe.

You could read Young's poems as a series of ornery winks, but he's really trying to find a way to balance himself in this precarious universe, these precarious systems of meanings, whether he's grasping on to Lorca or Love. His poems, which can be erudite, don't lend themselves to academic essays—they're not supposed to be illuminating as much as they are meant to be felt.

A friend of mine says that Young needs to edit himself more, to pause a bit, not trust his instincts so much. That could be true, but I think of what is lost with such restraint rather than what is gained with his recklessness. I don't think Young is questing after the perfect poem, after all. He doesn't want to be anthologized, even if he was nominated for the Pulitzer a couple years back.

Within all of Young's shim sham—within all of his posturing even—there is a fundamental sadness, a fundamental pondering that grounds everything, as he asks ye' olde question, 'What is the meaning of life?'

But we can do no more than pass through
these rooms and their sudden chills
where once a plea was entered almost
unintentionally that seemed at last
to reveal ourselves to ourselves,
immaculate, bereft, deserving to be found.

His opening quote for Skid gives a macabre, yet funny tone to all that follows: "The main thing is not to be dead." True, but Young's poetry makes me think there's more. Young is a romantic who has no business trusting romanticism. He's somehow a buoyant tragedian, a believer who's trying to figure out why he believes. It's the "trying to figure out" that seems much more important than the "not being dead" in the end.

Mary says

an abstraction of science meets language of feeling.

Rachel says

Being the daughter of a highly-skilled, highly-rational doctor, I am often told at barbeques with my Dad's colleagues that "poetry is soo inaccessible." Listen up, all you who think you are poetry-illiterate: Poetry IS for you, and Dean Young is your man. A recent recipient of a heart transplant, and a professor at the University of Texas-Austin, Dean Young is a poet who brings in the vocabulary and preoccupations of Americans in our contemporary era, and uses them to drive the logic of poems that are both heartbreaking and hilarious. Take this, "Ash Ode," as a typifying example of what exactly I mean when I say that Dean Young reminds his reader that poetry is not just one type of way to see the world, but an essential act:

"When I saw you ahead I ran two blocks
shouting your name then realizing it wasn't
you but some alarmed pretender, I went on
running, shouting now into the sky,
continuing your fame and luster. Since I've
been incinerated, I've oft returned to this thought,
that all things loved are pursued and never caught,
even as you slept beside me you were flying off.
At least what's never had can't be lost, the sieve
of self stuck with just some larger chunks, jawbone,
wedding ring, a single repeated dream,
a lullaby in every elegy, descriptions
of the sea written in the desert, your broken
umbrella, me claiming I could fix it."
It's national poetry month. Even if it's not, I dare you to read it.

W. M. says

Lightning bolts needn't touch ground.

Tara says

Pretty good! I think you've got to read Young in little gulps. Otherwise it's just too much random chaos or something. One of my favorite lines: "Even the this seashell is very small it's still singing about the void."

Catherine Corman says

my heart
which I knew was made of gold foil
glued to dust

-Dean Young, Skid

Kate says

Tantalizingly witty, irreverent and soulful. Young zests life on a fine grater.

From "Skid"

You bend the nail
but keep hammering because
hammering makes the world.

Not to be missed.

Gordon Hilgers says

Dean Young is generally considered the best surrealist poet in America, and his poetry is delightful and whimsical. His preponderance of mixing metaphors is actually fun, even as it breaks the so-called rules.

Rebe says

These poems are a mess of images, and it's beautiful but often doesn't seem to mean anything. It's just crazy and surreal, and random and weird.

Some lines I liked:

"Damn you, I don't know what you are
So you become a foreign language..."

*

"As one gets older,
there's more and more of you in the past,
mostly unnoticed at the time like
a foot that does not hurt."

*

"So much energy. People buying watermelons,
boarding airplanes, watching their parents die
and writing poems about it while above throbs
the celestial. I love how sadness turns
celebratory, the childlike apocalyptic.
Bees return to their hives, freighted
with nectars..."

*

"I love you
the man says as his mother dies
so now nothing ties him to the earth,

not fistfuls of dirt, not the silly songs
he remembers singing as a child."

*

"Sadness tastes like aluminum,
joy like crystallized ginger."

*

"The sun comes out and it's not an accusation
or a plea. You can sit in it for a minute.
Drink your tea before the declensions
of evening into the infinitive of sleep.
First you will wake in disbelief, then
in sadness and grief and when you wake
the last time, the forest you've been
looking for will turn out to be
right in the middle of your chest."

*

"Is man composed solely of yearning?
Nope, there's a lot of cinder in there."

Ryan Werner says

"I wasn't put on this earth to explain."

And with that line from the final poem in this collection ("How I Get My Ideas"), Dean Young kind of sums up how he feels about any sort of confusion you may have about what you just read and are about to finish reading. He doesn't really give a fuck.

There are killer lines scattered throughout ("If the spirit is to entangle the commonplace / in the congeries of the impossible, / I missed my chance with the tall Dutch girls."), even in poems that ended up not coming together. Because that's what happens when Young's poems don't leave me feeling much, when the seemingly-random shit he says doesn't become something greater than a concrete part of a larger ramble set down next to another one very different yet all-too-like it. Things just don't come together. I thought about a dozen of these 49 poems were great wholesale, but other than that, it was the individual line that kept me moving from one big idea plucked from nothing to another.

The thing about Youngs--about writing in general--that I think I like is the path his work takes to get to the largest feeling it can. "Whale Watch" is a four page poem that mentions a number of topics: stealing tombstones from Mexico, bullfrogs, space shuttles, confusing size with scale, Spinoza, a ghost, ice cream, a purple hat, Pan-Shan lopping of his hand, and way more. It almost comes across as improv, Young just seeing where his mind goes. As the poem moves, I don't necessarily feel the loneliness or thought of failure being rallied against blatantly in the first few and last few lines, but at the end I remember those bits that get mentioned, that it may rain for three days straight and that haikus should not be mixed with sestinas, in addition to that largest feeling, that maybe anything is possible.

I guess Young says it best himself in that very same poem:

"Nothing escapes damage for long,

not the mountain or the sky.
You may be unable to say why
a certain song makes you cry until
it joins the other songs,
even the one that's always going on
and is never heard, the one that sings us into being."

Gwendolyn Jerris says

yes, yes. oh my gosh, yes. these poems are like little defibrillators. i wanna put this book all over my face. written with pure abandon, with a pulse, with imagination and love. when i put it in my mouth it explodes like those tart candies.

Rebecca says

YES

Julia says

Dean Young is one of my favorite summer reads. His poetry can be light and true in a way that relaxes my brain and, okay, my heart. Not his tidiest collection, but a great read.

Drunken_orangetree says

On this day in 1936, Lorca was killed by Spanish nationalists: "Poor Lorca, all those butterflies/in his bulletholes. . ."

Timothy says

Witty poetry, sometimes he tries a bit too hard, but when he's on he's on.
