

An Emotional Electricity *The History of My World Tonight*

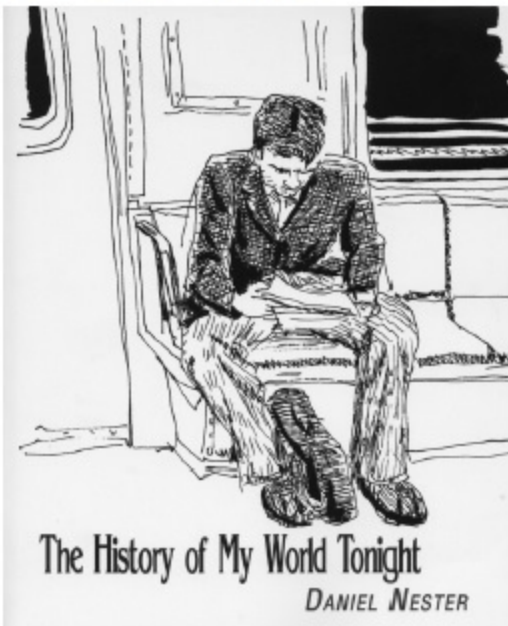
Daniel Nester

Blazevox

By Scott Glassman

Frank O'Hara wrote, "if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you." Daniel Nester's third book, *The History of My World Tonight*, proves that taking off your pants for 60-plus pages can have the same effect. The way that Nester shyly describes the awkward, relatable details of our lives will have you wanting to invite the neighbors over for a peek at these sweet, funny, socially energetic, and intimate poems.

Gone is the Queen-coated lens through which we previously viewed Nester's angst-ridden suburbia and Freddie Mercury-guarded refuge. The departure seems to have opened up the field for him and allowed an emotionally purer, un-footnoted self to shine through. Thankfully he retains the wry sense of humor and friendly big brother-like tone characteristic of his earlier work. We move effortlessly from acutely vulnerable



poems, populated with lines like "I was once sent to classes for 'slow children' because I wrote my name backwards," to poems of speculative bemusement, such as "Just Call Me Beastmaster of the Morning" and "Poem for The Evil Twin Episode of Knight Rider." It is a voice you would like to hear when you find yourself upset and alone in a crowded bar, a voice so relaxed it might just tell you anything.

Don't assume that Nester's straightforward narration, family-based reminiscences, and quirky details are incompatible with philosophical or transcendent moments. Quite

the opposite is true. These moments are well-placed and delivered easily, carrying the same candor as his lighter fare. As in "Effusive Letter to a Friend in Crisis," where he writes:

You say you might not want to exist
Where the purest effects of your life
Can't bask under a full spread of stars.

Elsewhere, in "Third Maisie Poem," you will stumble upon a plea for living passionately,

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or a subdued meditation on love:

So as the sun
came up, I had the urge
to address you, to adorn
your relentless miracles,
to reimagine a whole
lexicon for you.

An emotional electricity seizes the space around Nester's matter-of-fact, deadpan conclusions. We might find the speaker kneeling on his dresser, "knocking / against the window, a moth / wild to fly out in the rain," or in another bedroom, ashamed about recoiling from a girl's deformity: "I tell these stories to explain why people stop liking me."

Guilt, in fact, makes many appearances in this book, organized more often than not around its closest friend, religion. He writes of masturbation as being "covered / in holy breath, a sparring match / with an all-too-human god." He sardonically addresses saints, and places broccoli-chopping and sermons in comically close proximity. At one point, in the poem "Saint Blaise," the speaker describes finding out that Jesus flashed Mary "newly ascended into heaven" with his "Holy Papillae."

Regardless of the context, Nester has an uncanny ability to coax a deeper meaning from a funny moment, or vice versa. He does so quickly, typically within the space of a few lines, while social issues fall onto either end of his skewer. Besides Nester's capacity for empathy, it is his flexibility and range that make him a poet to watch—preferably from a raucous pub, as you sit alone, pitcher in hand.

Scott Glassman lives in South Jersey. His poems have appeared on the web and in print in *Dusie*, *CutBank*, *Cranky*, *Unpleasant Event Schedule*, and *Cider Press Review*. Other poems are forthcoming in *Shampoo*, *eratio* postmodern poetry, *Sentence*, *The Iowa Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. His poetry can be found at www.scottglassman.blogspot.com