

IRON ANGELS BY GEOFF LANDIS. VANZENO PRESS (CLEVELAND OH), 2009. 55 PP PBK \$19.95.

Reviewed by Carla Niblick

Cats, the cosmos, and cantos are the elements connected in this wonderful collection of poems by Geoff Landis. Romance and science are interwoven in many of the pieces in an effortless and engaging manner, along with stripes and flecks of pathos, humor, physics, space and astronomy. The poems strike a chord of the familiar in the reader, even a reader who may not be expert in matters of science. It is the connection to humanity - feelings, stories, and images that make the poems so appealing.



In “A Long Time Dying” (A Love Story in Twelve Cantos) Landis tells us a story as limitless as eternity and as small as a lifetime. He shows us the big picture in a way that reminds us of both our impermanence and permanence, a criss-crossing of two lives through time and space that becomes romantic and factual and fanciful all at once. Another poem, “Gulliver’s Boots,” combines a clever lesson in mathematics with a whimsical image of a famous fictional character in a new story that may leave readers shaking their head over Gulliver’s foolishness and a refreshed memory as to the meaning of the word “exponential.” “Fireflies” also gives us the big picture and another point of view while using vivid, sparkling descriptions of tiny details in phrases and lines that tell of beauty and scale.

Two of the poems, “Albert and Mileva” and the tender “The Einstein We Never Knew” give us a glimpse of an Einstein we may not have ever previously considered, and depict him as more than a famous and respected scientist. We are shown an Einstein who is in love, passionate and young, beginning his

life with his great discoveries ahead of him. The poems both tell of Einstein's first wife, Mileva, and seem to regard her with some sympathy and a curiosity about what went wrong: "Oh, Mileva, Mileva, little singer, little doll,/with your deep brown eyes and your dark and moody silences/Where are you now/now the world is old?"

The poems of *Iron Angel* are varied in length and style, from haiku to free form to rhyme, and range in feeling from comic to tragic. Those readers who love cats will certainly enjoy "Ready to Pounce," "That Old Cat," "Tree," "Ten Ways to Tell if Your Cat is a Space Alien," and "Lurker is Very Interested." The keen observation skills of the writer are evident in these portrayals of cats and their mannerisms, as well as his affection for them. Heartbreak is the impression one takes away from reading "Your Ghost on My Machine," a kind of break-up poem, and also in reading "In the White Room," about the tragedy of the illness of a loved one. Landis has the ability to take us out of our chairs to other locales such as "The Neon Cup" in "Open Mike at the Neon Cup" and to the woods on a cold winter's evening in "My Ripples." He creates wonderful images for the mind's eye in these poems and also in "The City of Fat and Jolly Poets," a feast of fantastic, juicy phrasing.

Geoff Landis is a poet and a scientist, as well as a writer. He works on Mars missions at the N.A.S.A. John Glenn Research Center, and is the author of more than 400 scientific papers, eighty published short stories and just under fifty poems.

THE TRURO BEAR AND OTHER ADVENTURES: POEMS AND ESSAYS BY MARY OLIVER. BEACON PRESS (BOSTON MA), 2008. 88 PP HC \$23.00.

EVIDENCE: POEMS BY MARY OLIVER. BEACON PRESS (BOSTON, MA), 2009. 88 PP HC \$23.00.

Reviewed by Joel Lipman

The *Truro Bear and Other Adventures* is a "best of Mary Oliver" collection that includes ten new poems and thirty-five additional works selected from a number of Oliver's earlier books.