

it all out. In a day-to-day existence lacking the distractions that seem so integral to most of our lives, it seems quite natural that the meditative, the poetic, even the oracular emerge clothed in simple sentences.

Piece by piece, Cynthia Rylant weaves a story worth attending to. Without sentimentality or consoling truisms, *Ludie's Life* reawakens one to the richness of simply being human.

W. M. Hagen ✓

Oklahoma Baptist University

Michael Schmidt. **The Resurrection of the Body.** Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York. Sheep Meadow (University Press of New England, distr.). 2007. 71 pages. \$12.95. ISBN 978-1-93135-747-0 ✓

MICHAEL SCHMIDT is a tough poet: sophisticated, allusive, intellectually challenging, but also gripping, disciplined, determined. He refuses to release a metaphor until he has wrestled out its full potential. In *The Resurrection of the Body*, his ninth collection, Schmidt takes up shards of Western culture and gives

them a living presence in sensuous language. In the title poem, for example, Schmidt presents the New Testament story of the healing of the centurion's daughter as an intimate encounter in which Christ holds the body of a dying girl and wonders "what he holds, and what it does to his legs, / To his groin, his bowels, to his rapid heart?" Similarly, in "Jacob and the Angel," the embrace of an angel, "his chest and sides / Smooth, his legs and thighs, not a hint of down," is as physical as it is supernatural.

Michael Schmidt's name as poet, translator, anthologist, and scholar is not as familiar in the United States as it is in Britain, where he heads up Carcanet Press, *PN Review*, and the graduate creative writing program at Glasgow University. His scholarship is evident in references that include not only scripture but medieval scholasticism, Renaissance painting, and such historical events as the disastrous 1845 Franklin Expedition to discover the Northwest Passage. But Schmidt's reach extends even to the news of the past months. One of the most impressive poems in the collection is "The Golden Dome," concerning the famous mosque in Samarra, Iraq, destroyed in a bombing in 2006. He also engages the current violence in Iraq in the most striking and original poem in the collection, "Nine Witches." Each of the nine speakers expresses an aspect of the folk tradition of witchcraft, all of them rich in detail and implication. The witches attack a saint, destroy a wheat crop, steal the clothes of a hanged man, and at the banks of the Euphrates, gather "skulls / Quite fresh, the faces on them, the wide eyes / Still full of tears." Schmidt's approach to imagery is synthetic, integrating the confusion of today's

news with the ancient but still powerful iconography of terror.

Interspersed among Schmidt's retellings of old stories are a series of contemporary, personal narratives that gain a deeper resonance from their placement among icons. In "A Red Grove," Schmidt describes an encounter between two tourists in a hotel elevator. When the woman recognizes the speaker, he feels enlivened "Like a beast Eve named, who stumbled, stood / On wobbly legs." These contemporary narratives reach quite naturally toward mythological metaphors in the context of the collection, and the allusive poems gain immediacy from their conjunction with contemporary experience.

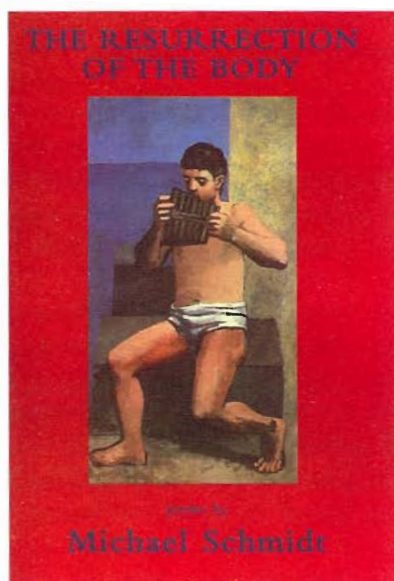
One of these narratives, "The Outer Trench," concerns two archaeologists who fall in love while unearthing classical pottery. That's a perfect paradigm for a collection that injects living passion into ancient vessels.

Mary Kaiser ✓

Jefferson State Community College

Mervyn Taylor. **Gone Away.** New York. Junction. 2006. 104 pages. \$15. ISBN 1-881523-00-4 ✓

In *Gone Away*, Mervyn Taylor's recent volume of poetry, which refers to New York, Florida, Senegal, Iraq, and Taylor's native Trinidad, the author amply demonstrates his empathy, sensitivity, and political passion. At his best, Taylor combines these qualities with a splendid eye for details that reveal how the patterns and rhythms of everyday life can be crafted into compelling testimonials that convey Taylor's depth of feeling for friends, family, and the state of the early-twenty-first-century world. Without mentioning by name the Bush administration's



pervasive global war on terror, Taylor deftly manages in several poems to express a sensibility that accompanies a post-9/11 world. After noting the hardships that can accompany life in the Caribbean—hurricanes, flooding, car jackings—Taylor takes a broader view. “But lately disasters come, some loud, / some sneaky, some from inside. . . / We live now / in open sepulchres, bombs a bus away.” Taylor’s frequent references to friends and loved ones indicate his warm embrace of humanity, and he despairs, in language that is powerful and convincing, about the turn taken by recent world events. “It doesn’t do to quarrel, / or search for answers. Just take / the damn flag and close the door, / the war, the heat, the hit and run / chasing down the highway like wolves / singled in a forest fire.”

Throughout the book Taylor includes poems that ruminate on the melancholy of departures and returns. Taylor recognizes that loss accompanies both the process of making a life away from the Caribbean as well as the effort to return and “start over” in a place that once was home. “Their hearts still / long for home, but they’ve been away / too long . . . / they’ve become / used to conveniences, hospitals / that operate, lawmen who respond.” Despite the apparent seductions of an American economy dedicated to consumerism and services, he also hopes, in a poem called “Going Home,” that “the steel band will begin / practicing a tune he’s never heard before, / and he’ll forget all about where he’s been” while away from Trinidad.

While there is much to commend in *Gone Away*, at times it is marred by flat and prosaic composition that lacks the compassion, wit,

and vividness that are the book’s strengths. Taylor describes a Kenyan woman’s perceptions of a New York City cable car without inspiration—“the car sways in the wind / as it goes across. The people / read their newspapers calmly”—and in certain poems (such as “Entering the City” and “The March”) his political message lacks original insight or imagery. These lapses detract from a poetic sensibility that gives voice to the varieties of the human condition in a time of displacement, returns, and a new global insecurity.

Jim Hannan
Le Moyne College

Robert Zaller. *Islands*. Boston. Somerset Hall. 2006. 75 pages. \$14.95. ISBN 0-9774610-2-5 ✓

ALL FORTY-EIGHT POEMS of this remarkable book start one way or another on a Greek island, and though we remain there from each poem’s beginning to end, we can’t resist the feeling that we are also being drawn to sightings beyond their peaks and shores. While poet and reader literally never depart these poetic islands, at times they soar above them like their essential inhabitants, the birds and gulls circling overhead, riding the updrafts of the wind, gifted with unexpected, prospective vistas of their topography. Robert Zaller accomplishes this without benefit of evoking the attributes in the familiar store of conventional symbols and figures that attend the word he uses as the title of his book and in those of many of the poems in it. Instead, he concentrates on the human and physical elements of the islands, intensifying our sense of their geological, mythic, and historic presence with only a rare minimal allusion to other

times and other places, as in the jolting reference to a “Hopperesque / gas pump, right in the middle / of nowhere” at the beginning of a poem entitled “The Four Elements.” The effect, in the end, of this American icon’s intrusion upon the stark scene of the brutal dominance of earth, wind, and sea only emphasizes the incongruity of its being there in the first place: “No smoking, the gas pump says, / sensibly. What would we do / here with fire?”

To guide the island visitor through the experience of confronting the questions the journey poses, Zaller cues each of the book’s four sections with prescient epigraphs from André du Bouchet, H.D., William Stafford, and Parmenides. As if they were movements in a cantata, a consistent yet subtly variable music conveys the procession of these sections from the sensory to the philosophical. Though unchanging, the sights and sounds of these islands, the voices of sea and wind and bird cries, call for responses of increasingly heightened perception. Two short poems, from the first and last sections of the book, may illustrate, though not sum up, the quality of its lyric reach.

Wave and Gull

The wind blows from the west,
the windcrests surge, dip, fail.
The gulls ride them like anxious herdsmen,
coasting the difficult air.
The waves are in their beaks,
the whiteness, the terrible whiteness.

The Waves Know Better

The wind saws the island
in half. It whines in fury.
The island shrugs.
It shakes out its trees