

Review: *No Lunch Among the Day Stars* by Jeanine Stevens

Reviewed by Barry Harris



Title: [No Lunch Among the Day Stars](#)

Author: Jeanine Stevens

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In case you were wondering about the title of “No Lunch Among the Day Stars,” so was I. At first I was puzzled. Then as I read through the poems in Jeanine Stevens’ latest book, I was troubled when I couldn’t find a clue to explain the title. Thinking it might be some new slang I wasn’t familiar with, I consulted the Google oracle. Nothing. Perhaps it was a familiar line from a poet I hadn’t read. Then, on page 50, I found it perched on a top branch inside the poem “Wind Chimes With Birds”:

*Through the skylight, high in our redwood
spindly and dark with age yet fragrant,
our occasional hawk in topmost boughs,
usually facing west, today, searches north...*

*With my field glasses I follow his gaze:
“What is he seeking;
no lunch among the day stars?”
The full moon leaves a tinge of sun.*

So there it is. A hawk at the top of a redwood tree on a, so far, unsuccessful hunt for food at twilight, which is when you can see day stars. Now that you know that, let’s talk about the book.

Jeanine Stevens is a master of poetic observation of detail, whether she is revealing a work of art in one of her many ekphrastic poems or describing ordinary details on a sauntering walk that begins her poem “Homestead.” In a few lines we are left with breadcrumbs of dissimilar symbols of home: “a key on a string placed on a stone,” the word “Smile” written in sidewalk chalk on a driveway, a tortoise killed along the roadside (“how cruel to attack someone’s dwelling place”), the White House, the sound of the chime of a grandfather clock. Then there is her attention to detail: an old hippie guy who considerately calls out “Hi Darlin” to not startle her on her walk and the distinct sound of a brittle Sycamore leaf cartwheeling in a breeze.

It is interesting, when reading Stevens' poetry, to take a side trip through the sources of her ekphrastic poems. In "Stepping Out," she explores the details in Roy Lichtenstein's painting, bringing to life a "jaunty yachtsman, / his face a playing card" and his companion who

*... walks ahead,
long jaw of a mature woman,
hair a swatch of Veronica Lake swirl
over red-orange cheeks*

She wonders for us about their motivations.

*She seems ticked off; maybe
he dressed in her favorite colors?
Perhaps her protégée,
love match, or just a lousy date?
The angrier she becomes,
one large cyclops eye
hangs vertically
from her bone white forehead.*

After I read those closing lines from "Stepping Out," I naturally had to locate a copy of Lichtenstein's pop art painting and can confirm that "one large cyclops eye" does just that.

In "Objet D'Art," Stevens pursues the art of ekphrasis by itemizing and pondering the contents of Andy Warhol's shopping cart in Bob Adelman's photograph: "Andy Warhol in Gristede's Supermarket."

*Surveying the lineup: split pea,
clam chowder, chili beef and black bean,
it's the label that interest him,
red as tangy catsup
white as creamy potato.*

*Bending down, he selects those
that say "Pick me."
Hungry, he will purchase two of each,
he loves soup —
one to eat, the other as an icon of history,
salt and modern invention.*

If you can believe a poet's own words, Jeanine's childhood is presented as a mix of being bullied or ignored and immersing herself in the comforts of reading, daydreaming and following the elixir of nature. She describes herself as a girl who says "On my childhood ceiling, how lucky: / glow in the dark orbits and planets" in her poem "Nebula," which is also reflected in the choice of cover photo for *No Lunch Among the Day Stars* — a photograph of the Horse Head Nebula which she locates for us:

*Sapphire mist under Orion's belt,
I know where I'm going —
Horse Head Nebula climbing*

*his thick neck, rich mahogany
embedded in delicate draperies of pink gas...*

My memories — not a black hole:
my nebula still lit by neighboring stars.

In ‘Dean’s List,’ Jeanine Stevens describes how she would proactively have her answer prepared for Shakespeare class so she could gaze out the second story window.

*I read everything three times;
made the list.*

*Go outside, wander alone,
seek singing bugs,
ignore signposts;
write that poem!*

Jeanine Stevens, who lives in Northern California, doesn’t let us forget that the nature she is in love with, while endangered, is also a source of hope. In “It’s the Snow That Makes the Mountain,” she tells us how for the first time in recorded history that Mount Shasta is devoid of snow but in “Violets and Smoke,” she leaves us with a sense of hope and the resilience of nature.

*We no longer have a “fire season”
but an all year event. The stench hangs;
this greyness resembles ghostly veils.*

*From a drone, sparks resemble panels
of pulsating red stars.
The sun, when visible, glares like an angry dahlia*

*Violets shrouded with smoke and flames,
may blister, scorch, wither.
But, there is power in undercurrents
that travel acres away.*

Jeanine Stevens is the author of *Limberlost* and *Inheritor* (Future Cycle Press), Her first poetry collection, *Sailing on Milkweed*, was published by Cherry Grove Collections. Her most recent book is “No Lunch Among the Day Stars.”

She is winner of the MacGuffin Poet Hunt, the William Stafford Award, The Stockton Arts Commission Award, The Ekphrasis Prize, and WOMR Cape Cod Community Radio National Poetry Award. *Brief Immensity*, won the Finishing Line Press Open Chapbook Award. *Gertrude Sitting: Portraits of Women*, won The Heartland Review 2020 Chapbook Prize. She participated in Literary Lectures—Celtic Symbolism, sponsored by Poets and Writers. Work has appeared in *North Dakota Review*, *Evansville Review*, *The Kerf*, *Stoneboat*, *Rosebud*, *Chiron Review* and *Tipton Poetry Journal*.



Jeanine studied poetry at U.C. Davis, earned her M.A. at CSU Sacramento, and has a doctorate in Education. She is also a collage artist and has exhibited her work in various art galleries. Jeanine is Professor Emerita at American River College. Raised in Indiana, she now divides her time between Sacramento and Lake Tahoe.



Barry Harris is editor of the *Tipton Poetry Journal* and four anthologies by Brick Street Poetry. He has published one poetry collection, *Something At The Center*.

Married and father of two grown sons, Barry lives in Brownsburg, Indiana and is retired from Eli Lilly and Company.

His poetry has appeared in *Kentucky Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Silk Road Review*, *Saint Ann’s Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Night Train*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Flying Island*, *Awaken Consciousness*, *Writers’ Bloc*, *Red-Headed Stepchild* and *Laureate: The Literary Journal of Arts for Lawrence*.

He graduated a long time ago with a major in English from Ball State University.