

FOREWORD

In his famous *Dream Song* #14, John Berryman wrote, “Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.” For any honest observer of the current state of poetry in our culture, the corollary to Berryman’s dictum is obvious: “Poetry, friends, is boring. We must not say so.”

That doesn’t mean experts aren’t taking the time to drive home that spike. John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation, sighs: “American poetry is ready for something new because our poets have been writing in the same way for a long time now. There is fatigue, something stagnant about the poetry being written today.” His cure for this malaise is the disingenuous command that poets “live broadly, write boldly.” Likewise, in his introduction to *The Best American Poetry 2008*, Charles Wright acknowledges similar concerns, but offers a more specific solution: “We need a kraken to rise up and scare the piss out of us into what’s in our hearts and whatever Urge it is that constitutes the soul. We need a non-verbal turbulence, a force in our poems.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I present you your kraken.

R. Virgil Ellis’s *The Tenting Cantos* is like nothing I’ve ever read. Stemming from what, in our society, is one of the simplest acts we have left—sitting in a tent—Ellis offers poems that are as immediate as describing squirrels, crickets, and spiders, while others have traveled across spatial, temporal, and astral planes to reach us. These poems are the wild and unapologetic ravings of a monk from within his vow of silence. They are the calm prayers the Fates and the Furies scream at each other from across their chasm. In *The Tenting Cantos*, Ellis is Buddhist without being beatnik; he is Pound without the creepy politics.

At their core, these poems know that the language is the thing: it is the only vehicle that might unlock the door which partitions the In from the Out. The poems, of course, also know that this is impossible. No matter: Ellis has persevered, giving us one hundred keys, one hundred chances to explain the trinity of things that matter most to each of us: our bodies, lives, and souls.

From aural fractals to fractured auras, these cantos will tatter your tent’s thin membrane. They are charged, witty, experimental, experiential, and wise. Ellis takes us from tent to flying turtle and Diamond-T dump truck to tent to badass androgynous biker to tent again, all in showing us what our new, forceful poetry might be.

Hold on to your chakras, kiddoes. You won’t have left your chair, but it’ll feel like you’ve gone a million miles.

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