

Roy Jacobstein



photo by Linda Ippolito

Roy Jacobstein's next collection of poetry, *Fuchsia in Cambodia*, will appear in 2008 (Northwestern University Press/TriQuarterly Books). His two earlier collections, *A Form of Optimism* (University Press of New England, 2006) and *Ripe* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) won the Samuel French Morse Prize and Felix Pollak Prize, respectively. His poetry has appeared in many literary journals, including *TriQuarterly*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Iowa Review*, and *The Gettysburg Review*, received Special Mention in the Pushcart Prize anthology, won the American Anthropology Association's 2006 Humanistic Poetry Award, and is included in the textbook *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry & Drama* (McGraw-Hill, 2006). He is a physician working internationally on women's reproductive health, and adjunct professor of maternal and child health in the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In December, 2006, Roy Jacobstein discussed his work and vocation with Frank Stasio in an interview broadcast on WUNC Radio's "The State of Things." [Click here](#) to listen.

Ardor

by Roy Jacobstein

No wonder ardour couldn't survive
the bullying linguistic fist of the Hero
of the Battle of San Juan Hill,
robust and lusty Theodore Roosevelt,
who also managed, upon becoming
the youngest and most virile President
of a young and expanding country,

to eliminate the u from the scents
of labour, the necessities of labour
and neighbour, the cacophony of clangour,
the heat of rancour.

O Teddy, burly
bespectacled one, monumentally chiseled
into the granite of that mountainside above
the Badlands, see how the world has grown
harder to command than any Commander-
in-Chief could have imagined a century ago:
no Presidential declaration can alter the rules
of spelling, though it can still delete faces
that leave us with a last short o on their lips.

“Ardor,” which first appeared in The Threepenny Review, then appeared on Poetry Daily, is included in A Form of Optimism (UPNE, 2006, Samuel French Morse Prize, selected by Edward Hirsch), and has been nominated by Jane Hirshfield, Thomas Lux and Linda Gregerson for the 2008 Pushcart Prize.

The Mystery and Melancholy of the Street by Roy Jacobstein

Piano in Melanesian Pidgin is big black box with teeth,
you hit him, he cry. Must take forever to reach the end
of the sentence in Pago Pago. And why is Pago Pago
pronounced Pango Pango, like it rhymes with tango?
Where did that n go? If it’s true the tango was invented
in Argentina a century ago, why’s their economy
such a mess today and when will the Mothers
of the Plaza de Mayo get justice? All over the world
women are named for what blooms—Daisy, Iris,
Dahlia, Lily, Rose—but no man is named for a flower,
which explains a lot about human history. Lady Day
always wore a white gardenia in her hair, even though
she wasn’t allowed up the elevator with white folk.
The Infanta of Castille may be the answer to the conundrum
of London’s tube stop, Elephant and Castle, whose origin
otherwise—like ours—is an enigma, a vortex of mystery
that must perplex even the most jaded urban commuter.
I know it does me, these mornings when a humid breeze
bodes another scorcher in the City of Brotherly Love.
Wasn’t Poor Richard lucky not to get himself electrocuted

flying his kites into those lightning storms, so later
he could have all his amorous escapades in Paris? A bad
bounce last night caromed me into the Emergency Room
with a busted clavicle. No sweat, you'll be shooting hoops
again in no time the intern opined, pulling her figure-
of-eight brace taut against my chest. But who can hear
the word hoops without immediately seeing that little blond girl
rolling her hoop up the ochre umber burnt sienna street
in Giorgio di Chirico's famous painting that portends
the rise of fascism in Italy according to art historians
because the scene is a rigid geometry of arc and angle
and her face is unseen, and though she seems carefree
in the Tuscan sun, she's rolling her big innocent hoop
into the looming shade.

“The Mystery and Melancholy of the Street,” which first appeared in Indiana Review, is included in Mc-Graw-Hill’s 2006 textbook Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry and Drama, as well as in A Form of Optimism. This poem is also nominated for the 2008 Pushcart Prize anthology.

Ode to Stegosaurus

by Roy Jacobstein

That magnificent cascade of convenient paired plates—
not only were they his central heating and cooling, Jurassic
to mid-Cretaceous, but countless 20th Century kids passed
their lengthy laughing hour in museums great or small
or in parks verdant or bare, sequestered snugly there.
How many of the adults they've become must still possess
their bronze or plastic replica, once boon companion
that shared bed and board and primal fear (of Allosaurus,
T. rex—those implacable, giant-thighed, flesh-devourers,
stalactite- and stalagmite-teeth ready to tear the instant
Mom turned out the lights).

O Roof Lizard, stalwart

walnut-brained ten-ton friend, rotund muncher of fronds
and leaves, state fossil of Colorado, what hath they wrought,
these paleontologists bent on revision? They've made you
more sleek, as if you'd been subjected to serial diet fads
and they all took. They've shrunk your plates, wiped out
your stolid symmetry fore and aft by raising your hind legs,
jacking up your underbelly from the soft green ground.

We've lost the promise of your familiar body: Come, ride me
into darkness, I will carry you and protect you with my many-spiked tail
and lick your wounds clean with my grass-loving tongue.

“Ode to Stegosaurus,” which was runner-up for the 2005 Iowa Review Poetry Prize, selected by Robert Hass, will appear in Fuchsia in Cambodia (Northwestern University Press/TriQuarterly Books, forthcoming in 2008).