

# The New Criterion

## Verse Chronicle

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### You betcha!

by [William Logan](#)

On *Ballistics* by Billy Collins; *Selected Poems* by Thom Gunn, edited by August Kleinzahler; *Substrate* by Jim A. Powell; *The Mind-Body Problem* by Katha Pollitt; *Sonata Mulattica* by Rita Dove; and *It Is Daylight* by Arda Collins.

Billy Collins is funny, everyone agrees. The birds agree, the bees agree, even the fish in the sea agree: Billy Collins is funny. Yet why do I feel, half an hour after closing a Billy Collins book, a sharp grinding in my stomach, as if I've eaten some fruit cake past its sell-by date? His wry, self-mocking poems wouldn't hurt a fly—but they couldn't kill a fly, either, even if they tried. Readers who have whetted their appetites for drollery on previous books may open *Ballistics* and be puzzled.<sup>[1]</sup> Our Norman Rockwell of sly winks, and elbowing good humor, and straw-hatted, flannel-shirted American whimsy is no longer funny. Worse, some of his new poems take place in Paris.

Billy Collins's method has been to borrow a dry nugget of fact or some mildly absurd observation and see how far he can go. Say you read that the people of Barcelona once owned an albino gorilla, or remember that Robert Frost said, "I have envied the four-moon planet," or find yourself talking to a dog about the future of America. Why, the poem would almost write itself! Collins's gift was to make the poem a little odder than you expected. The problem with his new book is that the ideas are still there, but the poems have lost their sense of humor. Here's what happens to that gorilla:

These locals called him Snowflake,  
and here he has been mentioned again in print

in the hope of keeping his pallid flame alive  
and helping him, despite his name, to endure  
in this poem where he has found another cage.

Oh, Snowflake,  
I had no interest in the capital of Catalonia—  
its people, its history, its complex architecture—

no, you were the reason  
I kept my light on late into the night  
turning all those pages, searching for you everywhere.

There must be a lot of comic things to say about albino gorillas, things that don't require sentimental guff with a twitch of self-pity.

Say you recall the day Lassie died, when, after you finished your farm chores and ate your oatmeal, you drove to town and scanned the books in Olsen's Emporium—and what books they were! An anthology of the Cavalier poets, *The Pictorial History of Eton College*, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*. Why, who knew? This is a send-up of Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died"—the book titles mock his purchase of *New World Writing* (as he said, "to see what the poets/ in Ghana are doing"). But then what?

I'm leaning on the barn door back home  
while my own collie, who looks a lot like her,  
lies curled outside in a sunny patch  
and all you can hear as the morning warms up  
is the sound of the cows' heavy breathing.

And that's it. This labored parody of O'Hara's famous ending ("I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of/ leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT/ while she whispered a song along the keyboard/ to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing") isn't side-splitting at all. The premise has become just another excuse for softheaded mush—Collins doesn't even get round to mentioning (SPOILER ALERT!) that Lassie was played by any number of dogs, that she was *male* (because males have glossier coats), and that, besides, Lassie is immortal and can't ever die.

Collins has managed to be what he rarely was in the past—dull. The ending in many of these new poems falls flat, the speaker gazing at the moon or listening to a bird in hopes of revelation. If Billy Collins can't joke about death, for example, well, who can? When he pokes fun at writers' guides ("Never use the word *suddenly* just to create tension"), or of teachers who ask, "What is the poet trying to say?" he's still our best poet at piercing the pretensions of the whole literary shebang. Get him off the subject, however, and the poems are suffused with mild gloom and misanthropy. He writes of having tea "with a woman without children,/ a gate through which no one had entered the world." You think that he's blundered, that he can't possibly be talking about her vagina. Oh, yes, he can! "Men had entered the gate, but no boy or girl/ had ever come out"—I'm not sure whether this is wickedly inventive prudery or plain bad taste.

When comedians stop being funny, they must invent themselves anew or retire for good. A number of poems here mention divorce in a roundabout way, reason enough for a man to take off his rose-colored glasses and book a flight to Paris. Indeed, the most hilarious poem in the book is titled "Divorce," and it's also the shortest:

Once, two spoons in bed,  
now tined forks  
  
across a granite table  
and the knives they have hired.

If Collins can become the bitter philosopher of such lines, there's hope yet. Otherwise, Poetry must do what Poetry does when a poet runs out of gas, or screws the pooch, or jumps the shark—give him a Pulitzer and show him the door.

In the 1940s and 1950s, it was almost an act of rebellion to compose tidy stanzas and tidier rhymes, as if the modernists had never existed. The influence of Auden and Yeats (those most seditious of seditious poets) was so overpowering on both sides of the Atlantic that an ideological mustiness soon pervaded the poetry magazines, as young poets wrote endless allegorical stanzas on Orpheus, or Achilles, or just about any Greek god or hero you could name. A few of these poems were

brilliant; many were good; but the mass proved just period sludge, the sort any age produces—most of it to be washed away on the next tide of fashion. Thom Gunn could write in this headmaster's manner with the best of them.

The huge wound in my head began to heal  
About the beginning of the seventh week.  
Its valleys darkened, its villages became still:  
For joy I did not move and dared not speak,  
Not doctors would cure it, but time, its patient skill.

And constantly my mind returned to Troy.

Gunn's early books, *Fighting Terms* (1954) and *The Sense of Movement* (1957), announced a talent for emotion controlled in muscular, labyrinthine forms. His elegance had a brutish edge, and his brutality concealed a few civilities (his cachet as a young poet came from writing formal poems on bikers and Elvis). It should have been no great surprise when shortly after his first book he moved to California and took up study with Yvor Winters.

*Selected Poems* reveals how long Gunn labored to overcome the limitations of his virtues.<sup>[2]</sup> If his early poems seem fussy now, polished into artificial antiquity, the over-heated poems on surfers and LSD are simply embarrassing. (The whole of "Listening to Jefferson Airplane" reads "The music comes and goes on the wind,/ Comes and goes on the brain.") Gunn's best work had to fend off Winters in his smugness and rectitude on one hand and San Francisco's beatniks and hippies on the other, but he never stopped trying to treat the incompatible realms of his experience as if they formed a whole.

August Kleinzahler, who edited this volume, has made a judicious and surprisingly conservative selection of Gunn's poems. Though he might have been more generous to the early books—only half a dozen poems survive—the most motheaten poems are gone, but so are later poems using the scatty lines of the Beats. I don't miss the loose-limbed verse of Gunn's middle period, or the poems that mentioned Ding Dongs or Charles Manson—or the one from the point of view of a dog. This selection stresses the reasoned continuity of Gunn's work, evident in his formal poetry until the end. (Even late, he could make a lot of metaphysical hay out of a nasturtium found in a vacant lot.) What remain are, for the most part, the poems that take serious things seriously, culminating in the elegies he wrote during the AIDS outbreak of the 1980s. Gunn's late poems were often bleak, haunted by losses to time and disease, by the slow recession of pleasure. After the completion of *Boss Cupid* (2000), he seems to have published nothing new before his death in 2004.

You'd hardly know from his poems that Gunn ever worked a day—he took as his gravitating theme a hedonism never wholly gratified. He loved the tightly knit stanzas and clockwork rhymes of the late Elizabethans. "I want to be an Elizabethan poet," he once said, but there's a great difference between being and imitation. In some ways, he was the thinking man's Stephen Spender, his rude couplet about Spender notwithstanding. Gunn was a poet for whom feeling blossomed through form (his motto might have been Eliot's remark that a "thought to Donne was an experience"); but he needed the resistance of pattern, the refined difficulty in the made thing. If the cost was too many early poems that began with lines like "Do not enquire from the centurion nodding" or "Lictor or heavy slave would wear it best," and too many gassy stretches of couplet writing, the benefit was the stately movement he could give the passing of passing fancies:

Why should that matter? Why pretend  
Love must accompany erection?  
This is a momentary affection,

A curiosity bound to end,  
Which as good-humored muscle may  
Against the muscle try its strength  
—Exhausted into sleep at length—  
And will not last long into day.

Shakespeare and Donne would have recognized that cool detachment, and Dante approved Gunn's vision of the afterlife, where the dead watch the living on black-and-white TV.

Jim Powell published his first book of poetry twenty years ago and was named a MacArthur fellow; but his books since then have been limited to translations from Sappho and Catullus. Long vacations are not unusual in poetry—some poets publish only when they have something to say. The longer the time away, however, the better the new poems have to be. *Substrate* is the book of someone who has just been released from a vow of silence and is gabby as a goose.[\[3\]](#)

Naked as the day they were born the first time  
the newly resurrected blink awake wide-eyed and caper  
innocent under heaven  
in the final clarity of eternal everyday  
like nudists without tennis shoes ...

This goes on for another ten lines without stopping for breath. Powell lurches into his subjects, wary of punctuation, eager to get on with things, gripped less by a stream than a flash flood of consciousness. There's nothing too trivial to be set down, and he can spend two dozen lines on a water-colorist brushing a few petals on paper.

It would be mean to suggest that the poet has succumbed to a California aesthetic of the most self-indulgent kind, but Gary Snyder and Robert Hass have a lot to answer for. In the middle of poems that recall a weekend blowout (“danced both days past// exhaustion giddy with the music/ and the company, the motion/ and the potions, the chalice and the vial”) or that comfort a woman after the death of Jerry Garcia (“You cut your hair in mourning, your pride, that fully/ touched your butt”), you begin to wonder if there's going to be an advertisement for patchouli oil on the back of the book.

After a while, you long for a poem that doesn't buttonhole you about the near extinction of the snowy egret, or the plight of a homeless woman, or the sublimity of California woodlands (“It's time I wrote my 'bearshit-on-the-trail' poem”)—and occasionally you get it.

Contemplating the first smog  
Ruskin thought it the lost souls  
of the French dead  
blowing across the Channel  
from Paris where the Commune's last defenders fell  
  
back fighting, driven through Père-Lachaise  
from grave to grave in a meager drizzle:  
starved workingmen,  
beggars and country boys.

Here the same sympathies that produce drivel about bear shit and the Grateful Dead are turned to deeper effect, and the different effort of weight and solicitude is apparent even in the enjambment.

(In a sense, smog *is* the ghost of labor.)

A good part of the book is given over to what is now unhappily called a “project.” Many poets believe that the sure path to success is a group of poems dramatizing some long-ago misfortune (three books have been written on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911); but, once you know the project, whether it’s cooking up the life of a Storyville prostitute or staging, yet again, the fall of the Alamo, often you don’t have to read the poems. The title sequence here mines the historical sediments of California in poems drawn from yellowed memoir and mildewed report, dragging through the past five hundred years or more of Pacific-slope history. Powell has an eye for the telling anecdote, especially about local Indians, but no idea how to turn it into poetry.

Firearms no longer terrify them and they are delighted  
by the effectiveness at distance of our Fowling Pieces  
upon a species of large quail prolific  
in coppices, the males with crests reverted,  
  
lead-colored, with ferruginous breast plumage  
and pinkish feet, more savory than those of France, and plumper.

I’ve read farm bulletins with more plot and verve. Marianne Moore took poems from odd sources, but what poems they were! She discovered a world of moral resource in prose compunction and prose reserve. Powell’s found poems, though the originals have been much reshaped, are interesting in their individual ways, but stultifying *en masse*, full of curious detail and untouched by artistry.

*Substrate* is not, as the publicity promises, a “cultural history of California” but an omnium-gatherum that gratifies fashionable prejudice and succumbs to contemporary mawkishness—the brief extracts possess all too many designs upon the reader. The encounter between strange worlds is almost always between whites and Indians—you’ll look in vain for a Sydney Duck or a Chinese whore, a New York capitalist or an Irish fireman. The poems tell us little we don’t already know about ignorant sailors, rapacious immigrants, and greedy mine owners, except that apparently for half a millennium Californians have mostly been occupied hunting and dancing.

Katha Pollitt has also taken a long sabbatical between books. Her polished, slightly unmemorable debut, *Antarctic Traveller* (1983), won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was so impeccably well-mannered it wouldn’t have looked out of place on a shelf at Miss Porter’s. Pollitt eventually made her name as a hot-tempered essayist for the *Nation*, though every now and then she still turned her hand to poetry. *The Mind-Body Problem* preserves the stray poems of the past twenty-five years.<sup>[4]</sup> It’s bracing to blink and see a poet go from early maturity to the whisper of old age. These agreeably mortal poems often take a glance backward at youth, then one straight ahead at the mirror.

The boy who scribbled Smash the State in icing  
on his wedding cake has two kids and a coop,  
reads (although pretends not to) the Living Section  
and hopes for tenure.

Everything’s changed since we played Capture the Red Flag  
between Harvard Yard and the river. Which of us dreamed that  
History, who grinds men up like meat, would  
make us her next meal?

But here we are, in a kind of post-imperial  
permanent February, with offices and apartments,  
balked latecomers out of a Stendhal novel.

The blunted savagery and look-back-in- bewilderment affability of such lines argue for the civilizing influence of a thirty-year mortgage.

Pollitt's poems are paeans to domestic stability, to the rueful charms of raising children, to the brownstone comforts of the Upper West Side. She's too clever a poet not to feel uneasy at times, harried at the edge of happiness; but the poems rack along, genial in their whimsy and complacent in their discontents. I knew I'd heard their tone before. Then I realized, of course! It was the voice of the *New York Times*'s "Metropolitan Diary," that depressing calendar of heartwarming encounters meant to show that deep down we're all just, well, *people*.

But on 14th Street

the Dominican peddlers sell ocean-blue ices,  
plastic shoes, and rugs on which a bulldog  
is cheating two beagles and a dachshund at cards  
and suddenly out of nowhere the roof of every  
flaking office building flares gold as though  
it was not going to be demolished tomorrow  
and everyone has the same American thought:  
*Everything is possible.*

(*Suddenly!* See Billy Collins.) If occasionally one of Pollitt's poems ends with a quiet shudder, why, by the next poem she's beaming like a white-gloved hostess again. There's nothing wrong with such poems, except that they're so cozy with circumstance, so numbed by prudence, their raw feelings have been smothered. You wonder if they haven't been taking Zoloft on the sly. Even when the premise is striking or unsettling, Pollitt lets the reader down with a gentle bump.

The static ambitions of these poems, complicit in their world of things (how *bourgeois* the poems are, given the poet's firebrand past!), are finally disheartening, and nowhere more so than in their repetitions. Pollitt is a lover of lists, someone who's been making shopping lists all her life and can't stop when she gets to poems. The list is an old device, older than the catalog of ships in the second book of the *Iliad*. Whitman and Auden sometimes used it to dazzling effect; but when a poet becomes addicted, when she can't get out of a poem without one or two (if not five or six), you begin to worry. After *marble, murder, saxophones, lipstick, Nero; gold,/ palm trees, perversions!; a spoon!// a xylophone! a breast!; Mairzy Doats, On The Rocks, At-Eze; Mass cards, seashells,/ photos; and O sweetness,/ sunrise, hibiscus, Chinese lanterns, hearts*, the book has scarcely begun. By the end, you never want to read another oddball list again.

Worse, Pollitt feels it necessary to signpost every major turn in her poems (she might as well be driving you along the LIE). She opens a poem with some wallflower of a premise but can't come to a conclusion without loudly clearing her throat and declaiming *Still* or *But O* or *And yet* or firing off a rhetorical question or two. (I lost track when I'd counted fifty of the things. Does she have a policy of "Ask, don't tell"?) No matter how tepidly amusing a poem like "Lives of the Nineteenth-Century Poetesses" or "Rereading Jane Austen's Novels" ("timid and queer as governesses out of Chekhov,/ malnourished on theology, boiled eggs, and tea"), I'm afraid if you gave the same idea to Billy Collins, he'd do it better. Why does an essayist of such stark opinion and Hotspur passion write poems that wouldn't muss the hair of a Victorian curate?

Rita Dove has a project in *Sonata Mulattica*, and it's a doozy. [\[5\]](#) A virtuoso nine-year-old violinist

makes his debut in Paris weeks before the storming of the Bastille. More than a decade later, Beethoven dedicates a fiendish sonata to him, which the prodigy plays to perfection. They have a spectacular falling out, apparently over a woman, and Beethoven dedicates the sonata instead to the violinist Kreutzer—it has ever since been called the “Kreutzer Sonata,” though Kreutzer refused to play it. The young violinist gradually falls into obscurity and dies in brute poverty.

That this dramatic young man was born to a Polish mother and a black father (who claimed to be, among other things, an African prince) places him in that realm of racial exoticism the Romantic Age required. Whatever prejudices it suffered, the age was less sensitive than ours to race, more curious and less hidebound about differences of skin—there lingered a sense that however noble the savage was, the savage in man could be civilized. It was an age interested in freaks and oddities, in giants and dwarves, in the Sapien Pig and the Mechanical Turk. George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower was born to his age; but he makes an appealing figure to ours, a boy taking advantage of a world that took advantage of him.

We know all too little about Bridgetower’s life—it begins in the fog of origin and ends in the mysteries of dissipation. He exists only through frayed evidence—some eighteenth-century newspaper reports; a few sheets of music; a packet of correspondence from Samuel Wesley (the “English Mozart”); mention in Beethoven’s letters; and a few appearances in the memoirs of the delightful Charlotte Papendiek, one of Queen Charlotte’s household retinue. Dove’s poetic biography allows her to embroider the facts, to cobble up scenes that should have happened, to ignore what scholarship might discover, were there anything left to discover.

In the past, the poet’s grand ambitions have often outreached her modest gifts. From the beginning of this overlong and confused sequence, Dove struggles to master the tone, with frequently embarrassing results. She wonders what would have happened had Beethoven not been Beethoven:

Who knows what would have followed?  
They might have palled around some,  
just a couple of wild and crazy guys  
strutting the town like rock stars,  
hitting the bars for a few beers, a few laughs ...  
instead of falling out over a girl.

*A couple of wild and crazy guys!* I’m not sure what’s dopier here, the dated hipness or the allusion to Steve Martin. It makes you want to write “Peri Bathous” all over again.

Dove has the supreme confidence that comes to most people only after a night of binge drinking, when they clamber up on a bar and launch into “Danny Boy.” In the midst of the biography, she has inserted a short play on the quarrel between Beethoven and his protégé. Bridgetower declares,

I’m a natural man, born under a magical caul,  
I’m that last plump raisin in the cereal bowl;  
I’m the gravy you lick from your mashed potatoes,  
I’m creamier than chocolate, juicier than ripe tomatoes!  
I’m older than the ages, yet younger than a minute;  
I’ll parade upon a pinhead or waltz upon a spinet.

(I can’t ignore the couplet just afterward: “Hell, if I’d been Oedipus, old Jocasta/ would’ve stayed alive just to call me her masta!”) Dove justifies the silliness by claiming that this is the sort of humor Austrians admire—if so, the worse for Austria! But why lard the notes with smirking asides like “Ouch! That’s gotta hurt” or “Bitter? You betcha”? Or elsewhere throw in inane commentary like “I

know,/ that sucked; you get the drift”? Or have Beethoven’s copyist say to a barmaid, “You’ve given us some/ heavenly head ... on the beer, I mean”?

Can it get worse? Of course it can! The playlet includes some “bad girls” singing to the tune of the old Angels’ hit, “My Boyfriend’s Back”:

Othello’s back and there’s gonna be a ruckus:  
Hey Viennese, Othello’s back!  
He’ll grab your Hooters girl and shout:  
Come here gal, and pluck us!  
Hey Viennese, Othello’s back!  
Oy, the violin’s his only training.  
Boy, his *Wortschatz* needs explaining!

I imagine there’s a red-light version in which the word “pluck” is not used. I used to think that Thomas Pynchon had written the worst comic songs in English literature, but I stand corrected.

For all Dove’s research (she employed an assistant), she still believes the old canard that Napoleon died of arsenic poisoning. There are pointless diversions and diverticula involving, amid much else, the theft of Haydn’s head, though this is of no relevance to Bridgetower’s life. The only poems here with the odor and rhetorical flourish of the age are in the voice of Charlotte Papendiek, who has the hungry eye of a fashion reporter and rarely forgets to mention a person’s clothes. Dove has freely altered and improved the originals, so the genius of Papendiek is all the poet’s. But Beethoven and Bridgetower and everyone else are the crudest cardboard compared to the ever watchful, ever alert Assistant Keeper of the Wardrobe and Reader to Her Majesty. After long neglect, poor George Bridgetower deserves better. Bridgetower’s life might make a brilliant opera—and, wouldn’t you know it, someone has already had the idea. It debuted two years ago.

Arda Collins comes to her first book fully formed, and it’s a little scary. The title may be *It Is Daylight*, but the cover is black, and the title page is black—the Goths have at last taken over Yale University Press.<sup>[6]</sup> Louise Glück, who chose the book for the Yale Series of Younger Poets, provides an intimate, bemused introduction that finds a blood-tie from Collins to Berryman and Dickinson, those poets of airless self-dramatization. It might be more accurate to say that she’s a grown-up version of Wednesday Addams, the sort of girl happiest raising spiders or trying to electrocute her younger brother.

These poems take place in the happy, happy suburbs, so of course the unnamed speaker is miserable—if the Welcome Wagon were a hearse, she’d be overjoyed.

At last, terror has arrived.

Next door, the house has gone up in flames.

A woman runs from the burning wreck, her face smeared

with blood and ashes. She screams that her children are kidnapped.

It’s truly exciting, and what more would anyone ask?

The blood and ashes, those manifest signs of mourning and penitence, suggest an attention almost religious. In these affectless monologues, even the disasters are deadpan. (Collins has perhaps learned something from Anne Carson, our master of Keatonesque delivery.) The paranoia and numbness that infuse the poems create a world where the speaker doesn’t know how to respond to

the terrible things that happen. Normality looks odd to her—“Nearby, a gathering of// wives are seated at a bamboo// table. They wear suits and dainty shoes// and little anguish veils across their faces.// They have expensive, sharp silverware.” Such portrayals of the lifelessness of the living (the dead, to her, are not dead—they’re just tanning) are delicious. When Collins goes too far, it’s a devastatingly funny too far—the ladies above “have handmade White House// and Pentagon salt-and-pepper shakers.

Collins is a Nietzschean fatalist, yet the world is a mystery to her, a cipher that can never quite be decoded. It’s peculiar when a book’s tone and manner are riveting, but its content banal, though even banalities can have irresistible fascination.

I thought how god loves this place;  
the grass was coming in, and the crocuses.  
What if someone died, or got fired,  
or vomited alone in the middle of the night?  
The apartments were wood on the outside.  
stained red like the color of a picnic table.  
I was so ugly, I wasn’t sure I’d even be able to drive.

At first I thought she’d written, “It was so ugly,” but her wording is more telling. This flat deposition (for a lawsuit never to be concluded) shows Marianne Moore’s love for the minutiae of being. If Collins has none of Moore’s élan or her enchanted gift for description, the younger poet sees the world through strange eyes, and in them the old world is made new again. Our younger poets were born a hundred years after the moderns; no wonder the lessons of Pound and Eliot and Moore and Stevens seem antediluvian, they’ve been so often absorbed and re-absorbed. (When you teach “In a Station of the Metro” now, you have to explain a lot about the Métro of 1914.) Collins, whatever her debts, has learned how to make the ordinary bear the sorrows of hell.

This poet is only dimly aware of her virtues. The book is far too long (though most first books would be stronger at half the length), and the poems become too comfortable with their stark monotone, their theatrical double-spacing, their fiercely prosaic line (Collins has a wicked sense of the demotic—“You go to your piano lesson. You// stink”). More is the enemy of better here. The occasional touch of run-of-the-mill surrealism makes some poems seem to lie on a spur line from the Ashbery factory. Sometimes the poems leave me baffled. (I don’t get the point of a long poem about a serial killer or a dreary prose poem about God and microwave ovens.) After ninety pages, even lack of affect becomes affectation.

Still, this creepy, irresistible book is a masterful debut. It’s impossible to know what Collins will do next, but more of the same would be tedious rather than unbearable. Louise Glück, comparing her to other poets, has apparently forgotten that the abrupt manner, the goggle-eyed guilelessness, and the bloodless tone (like that of a high-functioning victim of Asperger’s syndrome) were long ago patented by Glück herself. If the vampires of *Twilight* wrote poetry, it would be this sort of poetry—they long to fit in, too.

## Notes

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1. *Ballistics*, by Billy Collins; Random House, 113 pages, \$24. [Go back to the text.](#)
2. *Selected Poems*, by Thom Gunn, edited by August Kleinzahler; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 102 pages, \$14. [Go back to the](#)

[text.](#)

3. *Substrate*, by Jim Powell; Pantheon, 141 pages, \$26. [Go back to the text.](#)
4. *The Mind-Body Problem*, by Katha Pollitt; Random House, 89 pages, \$23. [Go back to the text.](#)
5. *Sonata Mulattica*, by Rita Dove; Norton, 229 pages, \$24.95. [Go back to the text.](#)
6. *It Is Daylight*, by Arda Collins; Yale, 93 pages, \$30; \$16 (paper). [Go back to the text.](#)

**William Logan's** most recent book of poetry, *Strange Flesh* (Penguin), was published last year.

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