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## *Wilderness House Literary Review 1/4*

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### **Grace**

By John Hodgen

\$14. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pa. 15260

Review by Doug Holder

I had the pleasure to hear John Hodgen read at the “Out of the Blue Art Gallery” in Cambridge, Mass., as part of the locally popular “Open Bark” music and poetry series hosted by Deborah M. Priestly. Hodgen impressed me as a humble man with a great talent. Hodgen, is a man who I presume, has experienced a lot of the shit out on the street, and has the good fortune and talent to report back to us. Being a middle-aged man I would have to say I was greatly affected by Hodgen’s poetry. I think behind many of my ilk’s dour and doughy countenances, a visceral battlefield of broken dreams and unrealized ambitions still fester. And Hodgen acts like a spokesperson for our “quiet desperation.”

This brings me to the poem “Men Lying in Fields.” I remember when I was in my late teens, lying down in the midst of a cornfield in upstate New York, and seeing each stalk wave in a fragrant summer breeze; a sort of pastoral symphony of movement. (I was stoned of course!) In this passage Hodgen wonders if in fact his long-gone grandfather ever took the plunge in a field before life chained him in with so much baggage:

“ And I wonder if in his twenties he ever wished to lie in a field,  
simply that, the way Thoreau did, before wandering off to Walden,  
if he plucked at sweet grass, whistled through it, wondered what to do with his life,  
before giving it over to Allis Chalmers and God,  
the promise and swath of eight sons in a row.  
I wonder in the arc of his arable dreams if he ever envisioned

me,  
the way I think of him now, the way Noah thought of places  
the sons of his flung birds might find, leafy with dreams and  
silt." (5)

And in the poem "Proof," Hodgen looks at the corpse of his  
father and imagines it as a work of art:

" When they brought us to see him one last time,  
sheet drawn, draped over his chest like chalice cloth,  
da Vinci's Last Supper, his body swollen, sweet tableau,  
his torso, head, like Easter Island, Jobson's Bay,  
the turtle shell that holds the restless world.  
Remember the blood vessels that had burst into burgundy,  
into hieroglyphs, the blotches like brushstrokes,  
like the scrawls of a graffitist stuck in a wrong century,  
some tagger spray painting his zodiac sign  
on the scrolls of the Houses of the Dead." (28)

Hodgen has penned a masterful work that has left me deeply  
moved. Highly Recommended.