

**Review of Drinking The Light by Laverne Frith**



Drinking The Light (\$12.00 U.S.A.) (Finishing Line Press, P.O. Box 1626, Georgetown, Kentucky 40324) By Laverne Frith  
[finishinglinepress.com](http://finishinglinepress.com)

Review by Pam Rosenblatt

Laverne Frith's *Drinking The Light* is an aesthetically astute poetry book. At first glance, the reader may think the twenty-nine page chapbook will be a religious experience, but it isn't really that. It's a highly crafted collection of poetry that seems to teach the reader a lot of things, especially about beautiful writing, visual art, and nature.

Through economy of words, enjambment, and concrete imagery, Frith explains everyday situations and aesthetics with immediate insight. He teaches the reader about light's importance in photography by writing about life and inanimate objects and the effects of light upon them. With ease and skill, Frith has the reader "*Drinking The Light*", understanding photography and art and poetry in a reading experience that is visually oriented.<sup>1</sup>

In his opening poem, "Toward Clarity: The Power of Contrast" (p. 3), Frith lets the reader know the speaker of the poem is interested in art.

cont.

<sup>1</sup> Alain Briot, "Aesthetic and Photography", <http://luminous-landscape.com/columns/aesthetics-1.shtml>, 29 August 2007, p.1.

I find the picture  
much too muddled

I play it stark  
strip out the middle tones

go from negative to positive  
to negative to positive

over and over again

only the outlines  
matter now

here I find  
all the subtleties

for my attraction

Here Frith has created a beautiful, flowing piece about a “picture”, probably a photograph, that metaphorically sets the tone for the chapbook to follow.<sup>2</sup> Like a photograph with a “muddled” or disordered scene, the speaker reflects that the book to follow isn’t clear in its intentions. This is similar to life’s path. The speaker seems to suggest that the following poems contain messages that are hidden, as he says, “here I find/all the subtleties//for my attraction”.

The speaker is interested in photography and the effects of light and immediately lets the reader know the journey isn’t going to be that clear, a lot of contrasts will happen, as often seen in photographs.<sup>3</sup>

And, yet, the experience will probably be a smooth, flowing and speedy one, as Frith indicates through the poem’s lack of punctuation. Frith doesn’t usually even capitalize any of the words except the word “I” which give a focus – a focal point – to the piece and the chapbook.

Frith writes poems about light several times in the book. In “In Reluctant Light” (p. 7), “In A Vase” (p. 11), and “Drinking The Light” (p. 24), the speaker tells about the dramatic effects light has

<sup>2</sup> “tone”, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=tone>, 9 October 2007, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Hart, “Brilliant Strategies: Coping with Hard Light”, *Photography For Dummies*. New Jersey: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2004, pp. 199, 388.

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on subjects and in scenes. Frith has captured with words visual images that a photographer or a painter portrays in artwork.<sup>4</sup>

In "In Reluctant Light", the speaker says, "the window sill is deep/in cobalt blue/bottles lined abreast//so many varied shapes/and densities/translucent warnings". Frith has described this scene so articulately and with such clarity that the reader can visualize the setting as if he was viewing an actual photograph. The reader can easily imagine "the bottles filled/with dry flowers/herbs and ornamental fans" written further down the poem, as well as the "cobalt blue/bottles lined abreast" because Frith has written so concretely. He does get a bit abstract and "muddled" when he explains "so many varied shapes/and densities/translucent warnings" and about "contained regret/overlaying anxious moods/of the afternoon". But this can be attributed to the darkening of the daylight where "a candle here and there/I only need/to strike a match". Through words, Frith has captured the tone of light so important to understand in a photograph.

Again, light is a focal point in "In A Vase" where "of early morning/window light/mums float//lower tendrils/spread/in counterpoise". The reader can easily imagine this quaint scene. Frith has created a beautiful poem by making the reader visualize "window light" hitting the "mums (that) float//lower tendrils/spread/in counterpoise." This poem is written at a distance, as if we are viewing a photograph.

"Drinking The Light", which is the title of Frith's chapbook, is written at a distance, after Frith has viewed a photograph. The person who took the photograph remains a mystery, but the concrete imagery again plays an important part in helping the reader visualize the artwork being described. The effects of light in a dark setting are revealed. The speaker explains:

in the wee hours  
on this vacant street  
the storefront mannequins hold sway  
  
their window dresses seize the stage  
drinking the light  
like tonic water  
  
light that shadow-drips

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<sup>4</sup> Alain Briot, "Aesthetic and Photography", <http://luminous-landscape.com/columns/aesthetics-1.shtml> , 29 August 2007, p.3.

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from their broadbrimmed hats  
obscuring the plasticity of face...

We have a sense of time, place, subject, and light so clearly and gracefully depicted through the use of words.

In *Drinking The Light*, Firth has also poetry about things that live in nature. The poems "The Jay" (p. 8) and "White Arachnid" (p. 9) describe a blue jay and a white spider and a moth doing what is expected of them. In "The Jay", Frith writes:

there are so many  
blue aspects of the Jay  
that are so difficult to capture

with its flitting nuances  
of hunt and capture  
its exercises

from break of day  
through transient shadow  
through bright full sun...

The speaker tells the reader of his observations about the Blue Jay's habits, "with its flitting nuances/of hunt and capture" all day long or "from break of day/through transient shadow/through bright full sun". Frith has evoked visual imagery, like that viewed in a photograph or a painting, through economizing of words.

Frith portrays the spider in a distinctive light in "White Arachnid", a symmetrical poem offset in the final stanza with its single line "will not wait." Just as spiders have the tendency to surprise their prey – and human beings, too –, the speaker "Startle(s)" the reader at the start of the poem. Frith has capitalized the word "Startle", which is what the spider has done to the "waiting moth" that has been captured in the spider's web spun "on the night glass". The moth couldn't easily spot "the night glass" in the "ephemeris of the night" with its "incandescent light". Frith has created a beautiful piece about the habits of the spider and "a waiting moth", the captured prey. Frith seems to have viewed this scene often enough to realize "Neither will rest for long/The permitting night//will not wait." Through Frith's simple observations, the darkness of the night is visualized in its "incandescent light". It's as if the reader is reading a photograph

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made from words.<sup>5</sup>

Besides dealing with photography and nature, *Drinking The Light* also has poems about paintings and a mosaic, as seen in "An Artist's Self Portrait" (p. 5),<sup>6</sup> "Young Girl At The Piano" (p. 14), "Arrival Of The Normandy Train At The Gare Saint-Lazare" (p. 17)<sup>7</sup>, and "Mosaic" (p. 16). These poems are, once again, about the tones of light in artwork and very good readings.

All in all, Laverne Frith's *Drinking The Light* is aesthetically pleasing and a thought-inducing poetry read. If you have an interest in light and its effects in art, photography, poetry, and life, you should enjoy reading this chapbook. And if you don't necessarily want to put your thinking cap on and learn about light's tones in various stages, you probably still will find *Drinking The Light* a delight to read.

- Pam Rosenblatt/Ibbetson Update

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<sup>5</sup> Klaus Peter Dencker and Harry Polkinhorn, translator, "From Concrete To Visual Poetry, with a Glance into the Electronic Future," <http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/dencker/denckere.htm> , Kaldron On-Line and Light and Dust Mobile Anthology of Poetry, 2000, p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Jim Albertson, "Artlessness Into Art," <http://home.inreach.com/jimleitz/Review2.html> , 1995, pp. 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> "Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926," The Art Institute of Chicago: Art Access, [http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Impressionist/pages/IMP\\_2](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Impressionist/pages/IMP_2) , Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004, p. 2.

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