

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

**Eating Grief at 3 a.m.**  
**By Doug Holder**  
Muddy River Books, 2013

*Review by Sam Cornish*

Doug Holder is a poet of the old city, the city of our fathers, of the 1950s and later. His most recent chapbook has been published by Muddy River Books, a new literary press. Mr. Holder writes poems like notes in a diary. I found myself struck by their economy, wit and urban melancholy. Holder is also a publisher and lecturer at Endicott College, as well as founder of the Bagel Bards of Somerville. As these poems demonstrate, he has a voice unlike that of any of his contemporaries:



**Sam Cornish and Doug Holder**

*There are no places anymore  
Where I can sit at a threadbare table  
Pick at the crumbs on my plate...*

This poem opens a book with the bleak humor of early Beat writing and it is a welcome change from the evasive realism of current poetry from the mainstream and literary press. It is like reading a newspaper written by journalists who records the life of the city in the poem instead of prose. It's like reading a white blues poem. From "Abandoned Warehouses":

*Sometimes you must follow  
The rat's path  
The vagrant,  
The scrawled invective of the graffiti*

Doug Holder is a poet of the street and coffeehouses, an observer of the everyday. He writes of old Marxists, security guards and his relationship to his deceased father — themes of the common life. I am drawn to these poems as I am to the poetry of Philip Levine and the prose of James T. Farrell. But Holder's poetry is deeper than that. He sees the world not for what it is, but on his own terms. He is living in the poem rather than in poetry.

*It is late at night  
And the fruit  
Has gone bad...*

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These poems are to be read almost as if the reader is observing a photograph, centers the composition and the stories within stories. The poems are not only about what Mr. Holder sees, but how he feels. These are his words and no one else's. From "Transcendence":

*You see when I am  
84 floors up  
my feet are still  
cemented to  
this goddamn floor  
and I don't know  
who I am anymore.*

This collection, if read slowly, pausing, will break your heart. I recommend it for its honesty and its purity.