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Living in the Moment

The first thing worth mentioning about Maria Terrone's *No Known Coordinates*,³ is the caveat on the copyright page:

No part of this book may be used
or reproduced in any manner
for the purpose of training
artificial intelligence
technologies
or systems.
Ever.

This may already be a frequent aspect of copyright pages, but this is the first I have seen it spelled out. That the prohibition's absurd futility is sure to become a relic is touching.

Despite the book title's hint at terra incognita or uncharted waters, the poetry is relentlessly urban when depicting the natural world and clearly plotted and pieced à la Hopkins. An early memory appears to be the subject of the first poem, "Under the El," about one of those fragmentary images that stays with you throughout life without ever being understandable. Remembering the play of shadow and light through the "slats / of the elevated train," she admits that she saw, "without knowledge, the flux / we're born to." She's in a baby carriage that her mother is pushing through an East Harlem market. I don't think we're meant to recall Hart Crane's vision of the Brooklyn Bridge, although I do: "Under thy shadow by the piers I waited; / Only in darkness is thy shadow clear." Both images I would argue are what William Empson called "versions of pastoral." That any number of the poems in this book include portraits of people, sometimes the poet, in different situations where art is displayed, in a gallery or in a sculpture garden, reminds us that for many poets, including this one, the most real world is the world of artistic representation. One of my favorites is the imagined meeting of Poe and Jefferson, in "Edgar Allan Poe Dines With Thomas Jefferson." The only occasion uniting these two geniuses of American literature is that Poe attended the University of Virginia. But the date she imagines for the meeting, 1826, is also the date of

³ NO KNOWN COORDINATES, by Maria Terrone. The Word Works. \$20.00p.

Jefferson's demise. Still, she imagines the student Poe to have been chosen to meet the university founder, but "Too haunted in his bearing,
/ too otherworldly, too Romantic,"

too poor, a Southerner but not an aristocrat
who brought his slave to school.

Still, much to praise—at 17, possessed
of a strange brilliance,

admitted early to the new university.

The poem may be one of the most sympathetic portraits I have seen of Poe, of let us say Poe *ab ovo*, eventually to hatch his raven. And the capitalized "Romantic" serves tacit contrast with the Enlightenment President. It is Poe's imagination that will abut Jefferson's, the "nevermore" of his raven will caw as a permanent afterword for Jefferson's self-evident truths. It has been a long time since I read a poem that so captured a change in the tenor of American history.

The human associations and temporary societies, Larkin's "frail / Travelling coincidence," are ingeniously created again and again in these poems, many of which you can imagine set in subway cars or on railway platforms or rising from underground into the sunlight. Terrone is always searching under the surface, by bringing together the freaks and freedoms of the passengers. "What We Wear in the Subway" gives us "the high-heeled woman born male," "the man caped in a shredded garbage bag," "the nose-pierced boy with a skull-inked tee," "the woman in a gold dashiki," "the traveler whose pet mouse skittered / along the pitted road of his arm," "the health aides crumpled / at the end of the day in cartoon-printed / smocks," "the dust-coated workers // spreading their steel-toed boots," and the passengers identified as "us" "who hide inside the parade." And all "wrapped in our skin-tight sheathes of silence."

I can imagine Whitman writing with this warmth of human connection and Hart Crane slipping into the skin of each passenger via his exotic inventions of language. I mention these great American poets as a way of acknowledging that this new poet, new to me at least, rubs elbows with them.