

Mylar

by Eric Wertheimer

"Eric Wertheimer's poems touch what is near and far way, the drift and distraction of everyday life that envelops and eludes us. In these poems, things as wonderful strange as mylar balloons and a rabbit tracking through time and symbols arrest and surprise us. Look: a "mountain rising suddenly in a doorframe." And there: "miniature satin hands." Life moving as slow and as fast as a sentence, poems refracting what adheres to the mind and senses: the odor of rubber, shadow on cinderblock, silver berry bark, fishtank light. There is a lot colliding in the world, making the conscience of these poems active and resigned. Allusions and keen reason, like a pair of mismatch socks, try to straighten things out - and sometimes do. There is a sky pitched by Wallace Steven, Ben Franklin holding onto his kite, Geronimo hiding in a cave, and Helen Keller, who - imagine - "might decode what is there." Might. All this happens in poems lit with sunlight in some too hot desert place, a life of cars and malls, wise daughters, strained loves, and entanglements with language that has to be nudged to be just right. It's like poetry should be in the waft of what happens. "Do you make the exceptions in your mind and, from small nearby wisdom, persist in loving error?" Wertheimer asks. Well, do you?"

—Arthur Sabatini, author of *Who Walks*

Eric Wertheimer lives in the desert with Mili, Dani, Aya, and Tupac, where he is Professor of English and American Studies at Arizona State University. He is the author of *Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America* (Stanford University Press, 2006) and *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). He has published his poems in a variety of journals over the past ten years. His other book projects include: *Pretexts: War and Writing in the Early Republic*, and *Within Trauma: Politics, Poetics, Praxis*.

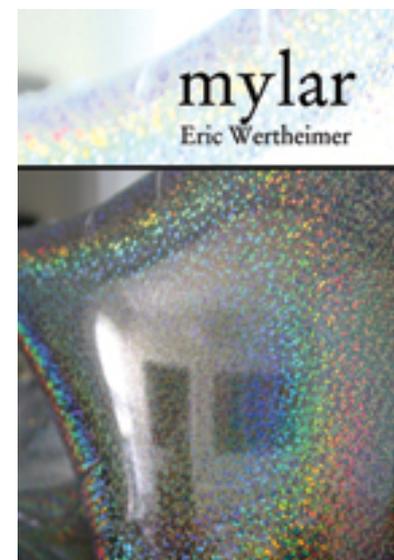
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The Kites

In West's painting "Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky"

Franklin's friends appear as unwinged angels, an effluence of a storm.

But after a moment, they are what they are--only slaves hard at work on modernity's indispensable rhombus, the kite.

Their job is to anchor the line, to see that it
Points to the west and beyond, keeping the key
--a double O-o—w, blacker even than the sky
they ignore—aloft for Ben's righteous fist.

They subject the great man to a minor
charge while others labor on more modern
generators and conductors, round fire,

in a calibrated genius of serene uncharacteristic disregard.

Franklin the hero is too handsome here.

And the poor little “angels of reason” are ugly in calculated contrast, puggishly balding, too determined around the eyes,
as they administer aid from the sub-regions of big cogito.

In Ben’s uncelestially linked hand, there is a scrolled cloth or paper, a careless gesture to the earth,
a connecting figure between the new dialogues, above and below, self-annihilating strike.

No one is wet in Pennsylvania. They are blown by an eastern wind.

They reveal nothing in their tasteful resistance to invisible forces.

Is the head--the cerebrum as it appears beneath hair, bone,

and cloud--

tantamount to the mind? Is the center of this scene a capital monster, with blind contraptions and sparks careening in oil?

Another kite soars like a sea-phantom in the blackest part of the sky,
above his mind. And the small fiends
who minister his knuckled frequency do not know to fear
its omen. Ben himself seems to launch this second kite
from the dark side of his authority, the leeward position of
change.

There is not enough of the kite here to trust the data,
which makes for a kind of distant satire.

It is enough to know that the line itself is important;
it is the kite, producing
the kite.

Think of the incurious spindles, the slack that must have
sped
out line upon line, Benjamin doubled,
in the agonized rolls of worry and
in the cool fastness of sight.

As if to say:

These sheets, all made gray, to the wind.