

# Reviews

## Soul Food

### Rae's Bar & Bistro.

By Rachel V. Olivier.

Dec. 2011; 90 pp; Pa; \$9.95.

Putt Putt Productions,  
available through [lulu.com](http://lulu.com),  
[amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).

### Angela C. Mankiewicz

There is much to enjoy in this first full collection by Rachel V. Olivier.

Olivier has been publishing short stories and poetry primarily in sci-fi and fantasy magazines for some years but her poetry reaches significantly beyond those genres - perhaps an "eye of the beholder" effect?

What's here are strings of sonnets, not necessarily sequences, with varied rhyme patterns; a couple of killer sestinas, expansive narratives and free verse lyric organized like a menu board in a city bar or bistro: "Beers by the Bottle and on Draft", "Wines by the Bottle and by the Glass", "Snacks", "Antipasto", etc., all accompanied by black and white photos, taken by Olivier, that have the look of drawings. I must admit I didn't always see the associations in either the poetry titles or the photos but they certainly did not distract.

Olivier's work often has a deep strain of sadness, of wounds trying to heal; there are also romantic leaps of faith and hope tempered by everyday realities; an ability to laugh, to enjoy the world's wonders without sentimentality. The occasional self-indulgence and lapse in craft among the many gems is a quibble.

Here are some samples of Olivier's imagery and sensibility:

(From "Sisters", p.20)

We muse over our lives,  
turning them over like shells,  
pebbles,  
pondering where they came  
from, what they have seen,  
where they will go if not in  
our  
pockets.

(From the sestina "The Message", p.24)

....

If I sit in this one spot long  
enough I will just be gone.  
Disappeared forever, but for  
one part of my soul - the  
corner

....

I wonder about the specters  
glimpsed from the corner  
of my eyes. Did they know  
when it was time?  
Or was it sudden and  
unexpected? Or was it a  
message  
from a loved one that it was  
time for them to be nowhere  
and everywhere? When all is  
said and done and they are  
gone,  
do they ever wish they could  
visit?

(From "Schrodinger's Cat", p. 34)

And the walls of glass grow  
thicker  
'round the garden of my heart

(From "Good Roommates", p. 50)

"A spider lives in my shower  
....  
Like an old woman who spins  
her yarn  
She doesn't like it when I  
shut  
the window,  
take a shower, move her  
things.

(From 2:18 AM, p.53)

... the clamor and crash of the  
street bum  
....  
He shops at our garbage cans  
looking for  
meaning ....

And some marvelous single lines and phrases: "Liquor of Styx" (A Goddess' Work is Never Done); "I wrapped my face around a polite smile" (Garden's Wisdom); "Sleep saunters slowly across my pillow" (Night Noises in the City); "blinking cursor, a jackhammer on my eyes" (The Conversation).

Olivier also has several longer pieces, "wanderings," seems to me, where she looks more intensely at the nature of San Francisco and Los Angeles; another, "Sybil Unrest", plays an uneasy game with myth and human need.

In some ways I wish Olivier had broken this collection up into 2 or 3 smaller books for more focus, more perspective, maybe more savoring, but as it is, the collection is well designed, printed on good paper, good ink and typefaces, good layout and easy enough to stroll around in, read and re-read.

## Yours, Mine & Hours

### After Shakespeare: Selected Sonnets.

By George Held.

2011; 71 pp, Pa, \$15.00.

Cervena Barva Press, P.O.  
Box 440357, West Somerville,  
MA 02144-3222.

### E. L. Ferber

Held's collection demonstrates the variety of forms, the twists and turns that the humble poem of 14 lines can take—along with the divisions of those lines in to stanzas, quatrains, tercets, the Spenserian 6/8, or not, simple and complex rhyme schemes, or not, and judicious dances with the caesura.

The "subjects" are also various, some attached and firmly to the concerns of the renaissance sonneteers (Spenser, Shakespeare, etc.); some in mid-stream, addressing conventional topics in a thoroughly modern way; others take up new and unlikely topics for the form. A particularly interesting example of the mid-stream, and the wit that informs the best of these is Held's take on one of Shakespeare's favorite muses, time. In his sonnet the motive is semantic, linguistic. "We waste you, mark you, try not to lose track of you," it begins, and ends with, "But mostly you mark our words with measure,/ Dwelling in verbs under the guise of tense,/ To give our sentences a guise of sense."

An example of the more unlikely topics is "Kindergarten." While 12 lines (the poem has no stanza breaks) recount the activities of a day in the life, "...After we'd drunk milk/That didn't taste like milk, we rolled on our mats/ And tried to nap while Miss Hays, basket on arm,/ Spread sand from the Sand Man on our heads," the couplet brings the surprise that characterizes Shakespeare's technique, "...Three springs later/ Meg Mears and I hid in the woods at lunchtime,/ And she showed me hers while I showed her mine." OK, it's not Shakespeare, but

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