

Jonathan Williams: The Lord of Orchards. Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens, eds. Prospecta Press, 2017. 496 pp. \$30.00. ISBN 978-1-63226-087-1.

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“Grit and vision seems to sum up the career of this strange man,” writes Ronald Johnson of Jonathan Williams, a member of North Carolina’s Literary Hall of Fame. Williams who centered his life in Highlands, NC, was a renaissance man. He was a poet, founder of the Jargon Society, photographer, cultural anthropologist, collector, and gourmand. Anne Midgette in her selection in this collection described Williams’s method of collection as “He approached the world with the attitude that there was many great things in it [the world] that not enough people knew about, and set about find them, earning him the epithet, from Hugh Kenner, ‘The truffle hound of poetry.’”

Born in Asheville, Williams attended Black Mountains College after dropping out of Princeton. While at Black Mountain College, he came under the influence of Charles Olsen. Williams started what would become Jargon there. Olsen’s call for his students to go beyond the page with poetry appealed to Williams’s eclectic nature. The Jargon Society published avant-garde poetry and discovered poets such as Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, Basil Bunting and others.

The book is a festschrift, honoring the work and spirit of Williams. Divided into four sections, “Remembering,” “Responding,” “Reviewing,” and “Recollecting,” the book remembered and discussed Williams’s contribution to poetry, photography and culture. There are also photographs of Williams, his friends and various scenes. The entries are written by friends, colleagues, and artists Williams assisted and influenced. These entries paint a picture of Williams like he described the Lord of the Orchards in a one of his poems, “*The Lord of Orchards/selects his fruit/in the Firmament’s/breast.*” Williams selected the best from artists he searched out and encountered.

This book is not a book that should be read steadily cover to cover. It is a book that inspires and offers a way of looking at the world. Williams once said he wanted “poetry that has whang in it.” Reading and comprehension of such a book takes time. Literary scholars may read it steadily. Artists will read slowly savor it.

This book is recommended for all libraries that collect literature about the Black Mountain College literary movement, books about North Carolina writers, members of the NC Literary Hall of Fame, and libraries that want to inspire artists.

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