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Contact: Stephanie Elliott (860) 685-7723 or selliot@wesleyan.edu
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In Defense of Nothing *Selected Poems, 1987–2011*

by Peter Gizzi

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IN DEFENSE OF NOTHING
SELECTED POEMS, 1987–2011
PETER GIZZI

Wesleyan University Press is pleased to announce the release of *In Defense of Nothing, Selected Poems, 1987–2011*. Peter Gizzi has been hailed as one of the most significant and distinctive voices writing today. Gathered from over five collections, and representing close to twenty-five years of work, the poems in this generous selection strike a dynamic balance of honesty, emotion, intellectual depth and otherworldly resonance—in Gizzi’s work, poetry itself becomes a primary ground of human experience. Haunted, vibrant, and saturated with luminous detail, Gizzi’s poetry enlists the American vernacular in a magical and complex music. *In Defense of Nothing* is an immensely valuable introduction to the work of this extraordinary and singular poet.

Ben Lerner has written that “Gizzi’s poetry at once captures the deadening, and the standardization of our culture and wakes us up, makes us ‘silly with clarity.’ Through his poetry we become almost painfully attuned to the present. He can name with precision our medicated, mediated insensibility and then startle us out of anesthesia with the beauty of his singing. Gizzi can move from the ghostly, flickering edge of

perceptibility to focused intensity at disorienting, Dickinsonian speed. His poetry is an example of how a poet’s total, tonal attention can disclose orders of sensation and meaning. His beautiful lines are full of deft archival allusion, and his influences range from Simonides to Schuyler, but those voices, those prosodies, aren’t ever decorative; Gizzi is gathering from the air a live tradition.”

Peter Gizzi has published five previous books of poetry in addition to a number of limited-edition chapbooks, folios, and artist books. His honors include the Lavan Younger Poet Award from the Academy of American Poets, and fellowships in poetry from The Howard Foundation, The Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. His editing projects include *o•blék: a journal of language arts* (1987–1993), as well as *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer* and *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer* (co-edited with Kevin Killian). Gizzi works in the MFA Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

We would appreciate receiving a copy of any review of this book that appears in your publication.

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www.wesleyan.edu/wespress
www.petergizzi.org

Praise for Peter Gizzi's Work

Peter Gizzi's pizzazz-filled poems are simultaneously all over the page and right on target. He is the most exciting new poet to come along in quite a while.

—John Ashbery

Peter Gizzi's disturbing lyricism is like no other—the innermost whirl of the daily curtain rising on outer catastrophe. His phrasing can wrench the heart, his eye refracts ordinary light into acute images... we are “listening to a life / un-lived any other way”—unmistakably, as poetry.

—Adrienne Rich

In his visionary quest, his raw emotion... Gizzi shows himself to be a master of the *mot juste* and of sound structure.

—Marjorie Perloff, *The Boston Book Review*

This new poetry, taking such care of temperature—the time & details of the world—meaning the space(s) in which we live—defining love in this way. Writing along the edge. What I call MR/everydayMagicalRealism. A way of writing about hope.

—Kamau Brathwaite

Gizzi's poetry bespeaks a long encounter with other poems, but they are fresh and urgent—socially alert and linguistically, rhythmically alive. Deeply observant and capable of sustained questioning, they deserve a broader readership.

—Maureen N. McLane, *Boston Globe*

I count Peter Gizzi as one of the most exceptional poets of his generation and consider his work to constitute a primary ground for the definition of contemporary poetry. Few people I've known have managed such an intensity so usefully directed.

—Robert Creeley

Gizzi's poems reach persistently for what comes to seem like the ghost of the beauty of the world.

—Rae Armantrout, *Poetry Foundation*

Gizzi is heir to Emily Dickinson's occult friendliness, her easy rapport across the "threshold" of the grave. ...But Gizzi's innovation has been to treat the lyric like a big radio antenna, simultaneously transmitting and receiving eerie broadcasts from the air. ...Gizzi's reveries, written in a language everyone speaks, happen right in the middle of it all.

—**Dan Chiasson**, *The New Yorker*

Partaking of an open-hearted, wild lyricism, Gizzi's poems balance concentrated bursts of elegy with uncommon clarity of perception and resolute humor. ...Gizzi's language is at once precise and rhapsodic; which is to say, visionary.

—**Stephen Ross**, *The PN Review [UK]*

Peter Gizzi's [work] is magnificent. It gives me what I need from poetry—a reminder to *feel alive*... he remembers that a shiver of sensation is vital, it's the first thing, before mere message or artful phrasing.

—**Ange Mlinko**, *Poetry Foundation*

Gizzi's gift for shorthand sublimity could defile Rilke.

—**Jordan Davis**, *The Village Voice*

Despite—or perhaps because of—his status as one of the most prominent "indie" poets of the last decade, Peter Gizzi is an entirely "major" figure.

—**Graham Foust**, *Verse*

Peter Gizzi is a stunningly gifted poet whose output ranges from beautifully compressed lyrics on the one hand, to capacious, crowded, weirdly convoluted, quasi-philosophical meditations on the other. His formally very cogent poems absorb the languages of tradition in a way that seems constantly to be opening quotations without ever closing them.

—**Rod Mengham**, *Stand [U.K.]*

Gizzi is interested in the vocal, the musical, the blur between poetry and song, and the human voice as an instrument that plays upon written words... They are poems of the threshold, the edge, the veil, the divide between life and death that isn't so much a divide for Gizzi as a question... Gizzi's elegies lament and seek to resurrect the mystery that has gone out of death, to reopen the gate to the underworld and let loose its song.

—**Sarah Case**, *Jacket 2*

Peter Gizzi is a living Master, and his *Threshold Songs* revolutionizes the lyric.

—**Seth Abramson**, *The Huffington Post*