

ABOUT *THRESHOLD SONGS* (2011):

Gizzi's fifth collection is his most profoundly rueful and wildly humoured work to date. This is a wintry 'un gathering' of poems, sung in the name of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" —a company whose ghosts include Basil Bunting, W.S. Graham, and the late R.F. Langley.

—Jeremy Noel-Tod, (Notable Book of the Year) THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT [UK]

Threshold Songs, as the title suggests, pushes against both abstraction and lyric voicing, ensnaring the close listener in an intensifying cascade of dissociative rhythms and discursive constellations. Songs also say, saying also sings. And what at first seems to resist song becomes song. These enthralling, sometime soaring, poems approach, without dwelling in, elegy. They are the soundtrack of a political and cultural moment whose echoic presence Gizzi makes as viscous as the "dark blooming surfs of winter ice."

—Charles Bernstein, JACKET2

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

Throughout his new collection, *Threshold Songs*, Peter Gizzi figures mourning as an address to the air, which might be nothing, or a voice, or a song, or a ghost, or just air. Partaking of an open-hearted, wild lyricism, these poems balance concentrated bursts of elegy with uncommon clarity of perception and resolute humorousness. ...in *Threshold Songs*, Gizzi's language is at once precise and rhapsodic; which is to say, visionary.

—Stephen Ross, THE PN REVIEW [UK]

Peter Gizzi's poems have always walked a line between stylized opacity and friendly, if melancholy, accessibility, enacting an argument about whether language is esoteric or generic, personal or public, our salvation from commerce or hopelessly commodified. This argument is at the heart of much contemporary poetry, but for Gizzi it also represents an interior struggle between the need to disclose emotion with words and the need to hide it behind words. The interplay between these two ideas has never been stronger than in his new collection, *Threshold Songs*. ...it's thrilling, and frightening, to watch a mind protect itself from it's own thoughts."

—Craig Morgan Teicher, BOOKFORUM

Without question, my favorite book of the past year. *Threshold Songs* attends to the messiness of contingency with a grave and urgent nuance, a careful listening for where syntax can reach

into affect. Reading these poems is like being overtaken by the uncanny feeling that, as Gizzi writes in “The Growing Edge,” “it’s Sunday in deep space.” To claim, as one reviewer does, that they foreclose discovery, is to deeply misread the cognitive work they do, which is undertaken as the pursuit of the limits of elegy and its weak messianic power to intervene. The short lines compress anguish into a flat plain voice, the syntax bending the argument with loss into something else. In poems like “True Discourse on Power” (“Because a sound a poor man / uttered / reached my ear I fell into song”), the real task Gizzi takes up is how we experience or undergo our categories for knowing, which are, finally, categories for tabulating and confronting loss. Death challenges epistemology at the most fundamental level. The result is a poetry of relentless, even excruciating, inquiry, tempered by a tenderness for what is broken or hurt or incomplete. A kind of nakedness emerges – a laying open after history that is at once anchored in the body and dispersed by spiritual longing, a desolate hunger for intimacy which is ratified by its own search.

—Patrick Pritchett, THIRD FACTORY

I am not alone in thinking about Whitman’s poetry in terms of magnanimities (somatic, affective, temporal, et cetera), and likewise not alone in thinking of Peter Gizzi—as both poet and ceaseless poetic world-maker—in terms of Whitman. More succinctly, in reading Whitman or Gizzi, I feel less alone than otherwise, even as Gizzi’s new poems trace abandonment with abandon, a grief whose spaciousness recalls that the Emerson who saluted Whitman wrote not only “The Poet” but also the searingly stricken “Experience.” How one knows one is adequately feeling loss blurs into the predicament of loss as an experience that feels (and continues to feel past its own wake) experientially self-depleting. ...These poems don’t recuperate what the lived and un-lived world no longer can maintain; their generosity (their importance and beauty) lies in giving us more and less than what conventionally we wish of poems. The more and less speak to the book’s titular threshold. The grass in song, neither underground nor above it, finds itself unmoored from the figurative terms by which it was previously viable. Gizzi’s threshold, as ought be the way of thresholds worth the name, is brightly, phenomenologically uncanny.

—M. D. Snediker, RAIN TAXI

Gizzi can be as sly and digressive as the New York School poets, as challenging and idiomatic as the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, but he differentiates himself from both tribes by pushing his poems toward a place where the making of meaning is still his foremost desire, especially in this, his fifth, and most personal book. “The grass inside/ the song stains me,” he writes in “Basement Song,” “The mother stains me.” Gizzi’s poems are filled with the same intricacies that enamor us of certain songs: the rhythmic flourishes startle but never betray his cadence, the timbres of his words share as much dissonance as they do harmony, and over everything is the lyric, the voice, speaking to us with urgency and occasion. These elements combine most powerfully in “History Is Made at Night,” a 10-part sequence in which Gizzi tackles the great subjects while lying awake in bed. “I never see through you,” he writes, “but *through* you the joy/ of all that is there

anyway,/ singing.” Like any tune, when Gizzi’s lyrics, rhythm, and pitch all operate on different wavelengths, the engine falls apart. But a great lyric will always justify a discordant backing band, and Gizzi knows this, singing over his own wall of sound, “I love you/ like dirt.”

—PUBLISHER’S WEEKLY (Starred Review)

Peter Gizzi’s friends and former students affectionately refer to him as “The GZA.” No coincidence that Gizzi is nicknamed for a Wu-tang Clan member, as both the hip-hopper and poet are known for deft word-play, intelligence, high-minded lyricism. *Threshold Songs* provides all of these hallmark Gizzi traits, but also manages to be beautiful and poignant in its intimacy.

—Steven Karl, COLD FRONT (Best Books of 2011)

Peter Gizzi’s *Threshold Songs* has me deep-reading-writing-feeling-thinking—offering a particularly powerful occasion for mulling through questions of poetry, language and thought... As threshold, this book is full of lullaby and elegy, full of edges, shores, curtains, openings, shifting clouds, fractures, winds—all things that act as a moving-through. Here, the I-writing a poem is a state of being that recognizes that we are necessarily thresholds, places crossed when entering from here to there, past to present, virtual to actual horizon, waking to sleep. While perfectly common, thresholds are also potential states of intensity, modes of relationality that have the capacity take fixed systems (“sweatshirt”) and turn them, deploy them otherwise (“a shirt from the sweat of children”). Far from proposing that such turning is “merely poetic” or “merely figural” or abstracted from the stuff of lived-life, *Threshold Songs* insists through and through that process and material compose life.

—Karla Kelsey, THE CONSTANT CRITIC

Peter Gizzi is a living Master, and his *Threshold Songs* revolutionizes the lyric. It does so by removing from that ancient art-form all its artifice, all its lovely incapacities, all its worn devices and smug self-assurance. If Gizzi is more adept at compelling the attention of readers than anyone else, if he's more capable of drawing out the emotions of strangers than anyone else—and he is, on both counts—it's because behind his poems, the poems of *Threshold Songs* in particular, is such a generous intelligence and receptive spirit that one must conclude this author has lived several more lifetimes than the rest of us. These are highly rhetorical lyric poems, by way of being deeply felt, compulsively ruminative, and thoroughly *lived in* poems. These are poems that are all-encompassing, by way of attending not merely to the state of their author but the far greater question of how any of us make our way without sloughing away everything that marks us as human. There is terrible loss in these poems, and while that loss has undoubtedly been the lived experience of the author it is also, and critically, our own terrible loss, our daily loss, of direction and belief and comfort and self-control and self-respect. If *Threshold Songs* is one of the most important books of lyric poetry of our times—and it is—and if it deserves, forthwith, the highest ephemeral honors our little society of scribblers can bestow—and it does—it is because Peter Gizzi more fully comprehends the rhetorical capacity

of lyric poetry than any poet in several decades. *Threshold Songs* will, in fact, help you to wisdom; it will help you to empathy; it will help you to the quietness of the spirit in which poetry must be read, even when that poetry is brash or disjunctive or paratactic; and it will help you, finally—and it is not too much to say it—to do more than just survive, but to live.

—Seth Abramson, THE HUFFINGTON POST

In *Threshold Songs*, Gizzi embraces what is sometimes posed as experiment's opposite: lyric, with its sirenic promise to transpose private perception into common plaint. Gizzi risks this nostalgic turn fully aware of its impossibility. As the failure of Ezra Pound's project demonstrated, it can be dangerous to fashion unity from the fragments of contemporary life. Like many of his experimentalist kin, Gizzi writes from the thwarted position of one who cannot escape his implication in the political and social damages he protests. His particular version of this problem, as dramatized in *Threshold Songs*, is to turn toward the natural world, albeit with the recognition that nature cannot provide the same uncomplicated succor it seemed to offer Wordsworth and Coleridge. Gizzi's experiment is thus to attempt mourning an illusory pastoral while simultaneously forging a more ethical relation to the real nature inspiring it.

—Christopher Schmidt, THE BOSTON REVIEW

Peter Gizzi writes immensely satisfying, supple poems, and his fifth collection provides evidence of a well-lived, not always permeable vision on every page... Gizzi's particular gift is to posit that shifting location where senses meet the terrible and the sublime, where political portent or its brittle actualities announce themselves in various configurations. To do this without stumbling is a major accomplishment.

—Barbara Berman, THE RUMPUS

Peter Gizzi's poetry at once captures the flattening, the deadening, and the standardization of our televisual culture ("This is the snow channel / and it's snowing") and wakes us up, makes us "silly with clarity." Through his poetry we become almost painfully attuned to the present, powerless to resist his injunction: "Be everywhere alive." He can name with precision our medicated, mediated insensibility, and then startle us out of anesthesia with the beauty of his singing. Gizzi's poems remind me that there is a tension at the heart of song, which has the power both to lull and to intensify... Gizzi can move from the ghostly, flickering edge of perceptibility to focused intensity at disorienting, Dickinsonian speed. The nerves "sing, blaze, and flame their circuit."

—Ben Lerner, POETRY FOUNDATION

Peter Gizzi's latest example of open frequency poetry finds mysterious languages—pseudo-scientific, philosophical, quasi-stream-of-consciousness reportage—dedicated to recording the experience of being alive and aware of the world and the limits of existence. Uncanny, and often, uncannily beautiful.

—Jon Thompson, FREE VERSE

Gizzi writes experimental poetry with a heart, even when his alienated lyric “I” suffers from information overload.... “Everyone’s listening to someone in the air / and singing,” Gizzi writes, and in *Threshold Songs* the poet descends into the dark, singing his lonesome song. “The song is alive,” he says in “Tradition & the Indivisible Talent”, which pays homage to a song tradition that infuses all of Gizzi’s work, and “It is the old songs and the present wind I sing,” he writes, channeling Walt Whitman in “Hypostasis & New Year”. Gizzi has a sensitive ear for the music of free verse, its drowsy syncopation. There’s an enjoyable American swagger, too, in the brash “Hey shadow world” or “Hey you, Mr. *Sacer interpresque deorum*”, a reference to Orpheus and a good example of Gizzi’s throwaway erudition. The quirky diction (“Time wiggling into amperes”, “The embiggened afternoon”, “my friendo”) and clashing registers of high and low (“*Winterreise* / hubba hubba like”) are also something to savour. “Grief is an undersong” in this collection, certainly, but Gizzi’s faith in song and mastery of sound make it more than a work of mourning.

—Ian Pindar, THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT [UK]

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. Because of the absence of personal detail, these intensely private poems read, not as elegies for specific loved ones, but as elegies about how to elegize and what it means to mourn. 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, JACKET2

Peter Gizzi's fifth full-length collection of poems, *Threshold Songs*, explores an edge-sheened shadowscape inhabited by undersongs and voice overs, in which one thing is always passing into another, passing for something it's not, and ultimately passing away. Within this twilight and twittering headspace, we hear an echolalia of the everyday--the gnarl and guff, the pop and whizz--that allows us to triangulate a proximal locus through inner sonar and outward soundings. ...the songs in the book arise out of "a vortex" of "birth storms," they also become a medium to "accept this handmade world," the broken thing all thought, all poems, all lives succumb to. And yet, these "birth storms" allow Gizzi to avail himself to be a medium for the numerous, if not numinous, others who dwell in his mind, to give them new life through his reflections upon them. We live in our heads or in other's, and the transport between them: that's all life is. And then it's gone. In the meantime, Gizzi proposes, along with Stevens, that the poems of this book are a place of refuge and dwelling helping us to perpetually reinterpret "How to live. / What to do."

—William Cordeiro, WORD FOR WORD