

temporary poetry. Nine months later, funding was cut, the telecourse plan was scrapped and my friend's post was axed. "John" — we'll call him that if only because one out of two male poets are christened John — decided the layoff was all for the best because it would free him to tour the lecture circuit along the west coast. It has been ten weeks since then, and no offers are forthcoming, no phone calls are returned and royalties on John's last book are drying up. Now, John concretely grasps how his frivolous enthusiasm for a video series undercut the academic legitimacy of his last book of poems, *He Who Eats It Raw*, which utilized the fictive voices of a coven of adulterous Eskimo women who secretly settled in the Puget Sound area in the 14th century. Well, academia is an old shrew (not quick to forgive); John is no Helen (Vendler), and *Visions and Voices* does not merit repetition yet. Although John clearly sees all of this, it does not stop him from starting another book of poems — long narratives in the form of courtroom testimonies — based on the (so far, fictitious) capture of the Green River murderer: a serial killer of prostitutes whose murders originated in the Seattle area and have extended as far southward as San Diego. Some of these long "poems" are beginning to appear in print. Generally, they are received as indulgent, as well as dull. Inherently, they are maddeningly didactic because each poem is a monologue on the role of the poet (chronicler as killer) and the product of the bard (poem as prostitute/victim) — particularly with this John!

...

Donald Schenker (like Will S. or my friend John) is quite hypnotized by the seemingly infinite possibilities of his "self:"

No Visitors During Lunch

The sight of me

*(dirty, wrinkled green coat,
huaraches with no socks,
long hair wild in the wind,
salt in the beard,
& masticating)
provoked either*

*respect for my privacy (a gentleman, isolated
at the end of a lonely beach, having a quiet noontime
repast:
a green wine bottle
lodged in the sand with tortillas & raw meat)*

*or fear (see description above;
a stranger,
unknown occupant of territory in a cul-de-sac),
not to deny
endless other possibilities.*

Each poet is to blame, and each of us (as readers) know who to blame for the multiple incantations of the self: Will's will, John of Johns, Donald's Donald, etc. How much soda is lost in the effervescence? Has Rubik altered the ice-cube? Have I lost you, my reader? *Up Here?* Schenker's poems are photo flashes during broad daylight; his vision is an overdeveloped photograph. The wit in Schenker's works is as obvious as the cigar in Freud's mouth. Although some individual poems stand out, Schenker displays no particularly unique vision or talent. Ultimately, *Up Here* hits you like the arrival of Rodney Dangerfield at a nudist colony; you would have to throw an old raincoat over him. That's all — old folks!

— GLENN SHELDON

GIG

BY JAMES D. HOUSTON. CREATIVE ARTS BOOK COMPANY; 1988.

THE MEN IN MY LIFE

*And Other More or Less True
Recollections of Kinship.*

JAMES D. HOUSTON. CREATIVE ARTS BOOK COMPANY; 1987.

THESE ARE BOOKS WHERE you don't notice the writing, but you like the writer. *Gig* is about an evening in the life of a piano-bar player. *The Men in My Life* is a collection of vignettes, many of them about the author's dad. Others about football, a tour of duty with US nuclear aircraft in Europe, and groovy-organic-and-together service workers such as the hip plumber, the kung fu teacher with eyes like G. Gordon Liddy, and the new age barber. In both books, not too much happens. There is a modesty of tone, and a quiet feeling that you'd like to settle down next to Houston and just let him talk. He'd be honest. You know there'd be no self-dramatization.

Gig would mean a lot to those who like jazz, because music and the language of tunes marks this piano player's book of hours. Months after you read the book, you find yourself thinking about Jack Mahoney, the protagonist's erratic and beguiling sadist of a boss. The club-owner is enigmatic, mean, and curiously charismatic. Why was he like that? what was his story? You remember Jack long after you have gotten a bit dim about pianist Roy Ambrose.

Much of *The Men in My Life* is about Houston's family. It's all been done before, the going back to the South to search for roots, the telling of the tale of the beloved wastrel uncle. But it's done fresh, you care because it's Houston, and you are left wanting to know a lot more about Houston-the-prunepicker's father who painted houses and was a singing fool.

— PAULINA BORSOOK