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REVIEWS & PRESS

Nada Gordon and Gary Sullivan. *Swoon*. Granary Books, 2001.

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Zaleski, Jeff. "...and a Love Connection." *Publishers Weekly* 87.

A total of four books issue this month from one of New York poetry's most esteemed duos, Nada Gordon and Gary Sullivan. Gordon's small-format *Foreign Body*, which made the cover of the SPD catalogue this season (SPD distributes all four books), draws on fragment and frangible literary plenty, haiku and hypersensuality, as well as on experimental modernists. In 1988, Gordon began an 11-year stint in Tokyo, and her pleasingly emotionally disheveled speaker tries to make sense of her surroundings ("Head fills with desires. A mauve refrigerator full of fish") while remaining resolutely herself: "my lovely hysterical grin/ gums showing little fangs/ eyes as smiling slits/ nose like a bat's// think white hand + black insects/ or tea rose + mildew—/ YIN TRAVELS, you might say." (Detour).

Scrawled comics and cribbed illustrations, simultaneous Creeley and Spicer parodies, fake interviews, fake blurbs, real e-mail, dream narrative, conventional lyric, altered rejection letters and drawing room drama are all part of Sullivan's lesson on *How to Proceed in the Arts*. Sullivan, who publishes *Detour Books* and the Webzine *Readme*, is the inventor of FLARF!, a mostly unprintable poetic subgenre ("RELAX! NOT going to wear my OINTMENT PUPPET/ 'cept 'if you're interested in doing my book"), and a regular contributor to *Rain Taxi*. Through all of Sullivan's deeply felt undermining of pretense and posturing comes an extraordinary, positive lighting of the way out, "[t]he poet popped open &/ hung like a jack-o-lantern illuminating/ the entire mountaintop." (Faux).

The latter-day romantic heroine of Gordon's book-length series, *Are Not Our Lowing Heifers Sleeker Than Night-Swollen Mushrooms?* (title courtesy of Keats), assumes various sub-personas, calling herself "I," " 'I " and "i," speaking variously in all capital letters, all lower-case, and orthographically correct mixes thereof. Our heroine cracks jokes about Victorian constructions of femininity ("Why is an unbound book like a young maiden in bed?"), explores her self-perception ("i don't know why/ i am always wanting you—/ someone—to have my interiority"), tells bald-faced lies, has plenty of sex and continually distracts herself and whoever might try to cut her down to size: "If you are still confused/ by the form, invoke/ its creator, its secret/ prey. Jolly with/ composition, she/ has stretched/ her lower lip/ up over her head." (Spuyten Duyvil).

But the duo's tour-de-force is surely *Swoon*, an electronic literary courtship that spirals into real life in a manner Griffin & Sabine never manage. In March of 1998, Nada posted a query on a poetry discussion

list, and Gary replied "backchannel," asking if she were the same person who went by "gordon" and lived in San Francisco years earlier. Amid Sullivan's disintegrating marriage in New York and Gordon's failing Tokyo relationship, the two produced the equivalent of 5,000 manuscript pages over the course of a year as they traded quips, seductions, likes and dislikes, ideas about aesthetics, sexual preferences, photos, poems and poetry gossip, worries, fears and neuroses, plans for visits and—the failure of love at first sight and its aftermath. It makes for the most true-to-life literary love story since Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett hit Florence. (Granary).