



Souls of the Labadie Tract

Susan Howe

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Souls of the Labadie Tract finds Susan Howe exploring (or unsettling) one of her favorite domains, the psychic past of America, with Jonathan Edwards and Wallace Stevens as her presiding tutelary geniuses. Three long poems interspersed with prose pieces, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* takes as its starting point the Labadists, a Utopian Quietist sect that moved from the Netherlands to Cecil County, Maryland, in 1684. The community dissolved in 1722. In *Souls*, Howe is lured by archives and libraries, with their ghosts, cranks, manuscripts and scraps of material. One thread winding through *Souls* is silken: from the epigraphs of Edwards ("the silkworm is a remarkable type of Christ...") and of Stevens ("the poet makes silk dresses out of worms") to the mulberry tree (food of the silkworms) and the fragment of a wedding dress that ends the book. *Souls of the Labadie Tract* presents Howe with her signature hybrids of poetry and prose, of evocation and refraction:

There it is there it is—you

want the great wicked city

Oh I wouldn't I wouldn't

It's not only that you're not

It's what wills and will not.

Souls of the Labadie Tract Details

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Author : Susan Howe

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From Reader Review Souls of the Labadie Tract for online ebook

Jocelyn says

"Armed with call numbers, I find my way among scriptural exegeses, ethical homiletics, antiquarian researches, tropes and allegories, totemic animal parents, prophets, and poets. My retrospective excursions follow the principle that ghosts wrapped in appreciative obituaries by committee members, or dedications presented at vanished community field meetings, can be reanimated by appropriation."

Cooper Renner says

Howe's poetry is chiefly "not sensible", at least to me, but her tight nuggets of language hover, often beautifully, near to sense, and her subjects, sometimes announced in prose, are fascinating. The last of the longish poems here is as much concrete poetry, or visual art, as "regular" poetry. I didn't find myself quite as taken by this book as by the more recent *That This*, but still, this is so far outside the American poetic mainstream--courteous ruminations on ordinary life--that I immediately gravitate toward it.

Ellie says

Excellent: a little difficult for me & took (as all her works do, but this especially) a number of readings to begin to grasp. Well worth the time.
Ellie NYC

jeff says

a fog of words in which one sees pieces of the past which are then swallowed up by the present and the process of considering them. and i'm learning to appreciate collage pieces--tho i would love to see the actual pieces of paper as opposed to the facsimile necessary for putting them in a book. poetry of thinking about thinking.

Maisie L says

She writes essays with no equal.

And some of her poetry veers off beyond understanding, but some of these strange cubes are among my favorite poems, my absolute favorite poems-- "what fire is this, that wells from the illuminated manuscript, leaf through it, go on, touch" (Hilda Hilst). But it's a cool flame, in a soul that reaches, and is quiet, and kisses lightly.

Essays: 5

Poetry: 3.75

Cheryl says

Susan Howe is my poetry godmother.

mwpm says

Indifferent truth and trust
am in you and of you air
utterance blindness of you

That we are come to that
Between us here to know
Things in the perfect way

- pg. 27

* * *

Authorize me and I act
what I am I must remain
only suffer me to tell it

if I can beginning then
Then before - and then

- pg. 37

* * *

White line of a
hand's breadth
A white wall a
door any place

Millennial hopes
certainly part of it

- pg. 43

* * *

"Here we are" - You can't

hear us without having to be
us knowing everything we

know - you know you can't

Verbal echoes so many ghost
poets I think of you as wild
and fugitive - "Stop awhile"

- pg. 58

* * *

There it is there it is - you
want the great wicked city
Oh I wouldn't I wouldn't

It's not only that you're not
It's what wills and will not

- pg. 67

* * *

In the house the house is all
house and each of its authors
passing from room to room

Short eclogues as one might
say on tiptoe do not infringe

- pg. 77

* * *

A smile not of resurrection
when sun appears to come
forth as bridegroom home

Workaholic state of revery
Destitute of benevolence

- pg. 85

* * *

I heard myself as if you

had heard me utopically
before reflection I heart
you outside only inside
sometimes only a word
So in a particular world
as in the spiritual world

- pg. 96

* * *

I write nothing without
coming nearer - Go your
way as if I never appear
to myself or know what
Laughter at night while
the agitated house slept

- pg. 105

John says

excellent experimental Poetry

Kristen says

I might not have read this book at all if it weren't for Sharon (thanks, Sharon!)
It's the best book of poems I've read by SH, at least since The Europe of Trusts.

Andy says

A beautiful book. Howe's relation to the past gets richer and richer. Here I especially love the title sequence, where a "you" gradually accumulates, addressed by ghosts from lost history... and the final sequence, "A Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," with its final narrowing slit or eye, as if time is again receding, closing up... the profoundly moving sense, in this very visual work, of a time that time itself passes through, or the movements of a contemporary reader's time in relation to a passed time that isn't static, but has its own life and motion.

Opal McCarthy says

'America in a skin coat
the color of the juice of
mulberries' her fantastic
cap full of eyes will lead
our way as mind or ears
Goodnight goodnight

"The future seemed to lie in this forest of theories, letters, and forgotten actualities.

I felt a harmony beyond the confinement of our being merely dross or tin"

Joe says

It is wrong to write a review of her book on hand but if I don't do it while procrastinating at work I won't do it. This is I think as good a place to start with Howe's later work as any. Her work has always been intertextual but after Europe of Trusts her sources become more remote and access to her work across increasingly slender bridges. And as much as I like THE IDEA of an entire book on bedhangings, I think I first need someone to convince me how a book on bed hangings fits--nay hinges!--into a post-feminist critique of the domestic interior or something like that?

Souls is an engagement with an American, Puritan(?) Utopian community that moved from the Netherlands to Cecil County, MD. In chopping up and piecing back together the language of an extreme form of Puritanism and the Utopian impulse, it in some ways maps the messy unconsciousness of the Labadists but also the many similar religious communities whose covenants eventually dissolved and left everyone just a citizen of America. It is both mournful and generative. This is probably a lot of over generalizing--but, hey, no book.

This one is leading me also toward Dan Beachy-Quick's Mulberry what do to its silk motif. And back toward Dickinson because duh. Man, I need to read more Dickinson.

Antonio Delgado says

Susan Howe's poetry brings the mythical past with its almost insignificant details into the becoming of the

present beyond historical implications. Echoes of Dickinson and Woolf haunt her words.

Richard Deming says

Beautiful, haunting, haunted--this book extends Howe's previous work in exciting ways.

Gary Norris says

i want this
