

in rhythm to my own breath, the world hidden

beyond the nailhead's own demands  
while inside a focused stillness intact and  
undisturbed

also incessant asked Who am I? Why this  
action?

What is this place I am in?

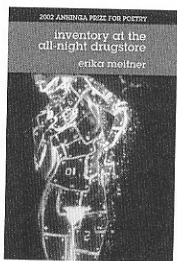
In many ways, these poems strive to answer  
exactly these questions, both metaphorically and  
literally.

Turpin also concerns himself with weight.  
The notion returns as the weight of a working  
body, of a child held beneath the arms, the work  
itself, forebears and mentors. Turpin measures the  
balance between the desire of his characters for  
freedom, financial and metaphysical, with the  
gravity of work. No one escapes the fact that the  
hammer, once raised, must fall again. One must  
always anticipate the weight, as the poet does in  
describing the early days of work:

Soon I began to adopt the physical swagger  
universal to men who work with their bodies:  
an acceptance of weariness, of gravity,  
of weight—and a defiant nonchalance  
in response to it, the posture  
recognizable in the hips and shoulders.

Turpin, whose poems have appeared in *The  
Threepenny Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Slate*,  
*Boston Review*, and *Ploughshares*, among others,  
as well as the anthology, *The Handbook of  
Heartbreak* edited by Robert Pinsky, links work  
with identity, slowly constructing character  
through action and gesture. He reinforces the idea  
of skilled craftsman with his multiple use of form.  
For readers interested in the rarely voiced world  
of the journeyman, this collection provides a vivid  
entrée. (September)

Camille-Yvette Welsh



## Inventory at the All-Night Drugstore

Erika Meitner  
Anhinga Press  
112 pages  
Softcover \$12.00  
0-938078-74-7

If this book were music, it  
might be labeled “urban  
alternative” and shelved near the work of song-  
writers like Suzanne Vega and Tracy Chapman.  
The author, now a visiting professor of writing at  
the University of California–Santa Cruz, is both  
well-educated and well-traveled for someone not  
yet thirty. Her restless, energetic, casual free-verse  
poems trace a modern life in which more-or-less  
casual sex, earnest efforts to teach middle school,  
and celebrations of Jewish grandmothers who  
survived the Holocaust can somehow coexist and  
even cohere.

Organized in a loose chronology, this collec-  
tion, winner of the 2002 Anhinga Prize for Poetry,  
begins with adolescent explorations of love and

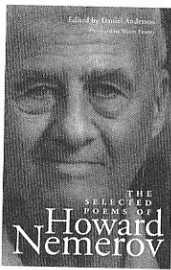
lust. “Home Economics” uses sewing-machine  
terminology to examine sexual curiosity: “Was  
anything we learned here / useful? Turn me on, /  
make me hum. Thread / my guide, honey, take up  
/ my lever. Clutch my knob / with your free arm.”  
The first half of the book explores the frightening  
attractions of both sex and love in the parks,  
beaches, and pools of Meitner’s young life.

The imagery is frank, even explicit, without  
lapsing into mere eroticism; in poems like “Go  
Cart, Go” Meitner writes with a weirdly engaging  
mix of humor and sadness: “At intervals, we have  
shopping-cart- / in-parking-lot sex, bumping nois-  
ily along, / parts clattering into one another.” The  
poem’s beautiful ending reveals that desire, not  
sex, is Meitner’s real obsession: “When I first met  
you / I thought you were a firefighter. All summer  
/ you ran towards danger—some nights / without  
shoes. I dream of kissing you / in airports.”

When these poems shock, it is with the pain  
of their characters, rather than their author.  
Meitner vividly sketches individuals like “the kid  
in the back row hiding behind a curtain of hair /  
carving swear words into his arm with the staple  
remover” and the grandmother who shouts  
“What have you been through?” at a PTA meet-  
ing. The poet more fully describes one of the  
sixth-graders she teaches: “She’s eleven, has a  
small zirconia stud through her nose, / can barely  
write a full sentence or read / above third grade  
level—but she’s beautiful, / a curse in this neigh-  
borhood / where most girls are pregnant by fif-  
teen, but I’m still jealous.”

This willingness to face her own weaknesses  
is perhaps Meitner’s most winning quality.  
Observing a blind man riding a bumper car at a  
county fair, she muses “I wish I could be that fear-  
less”—but there is plenty of emotional bravery in  
this fine first book. (October)

Jeff Gundy



## The Selected Poems of Howard Nemerov

Daniel Anderson, editor  
Ohio University Press  
188 pages  
Hardcover \$24.95  
Softcover \$16.95  
0-8040-1059-5 (HC)  
0-8040-1060-9 (SC)

Robert Frost once said that writing poetry with-  
out form was like playing tennis without the net;  
Nemerov took those words to heart, often using  
form, particularly blank verse, and adding metic-  
ulous attention to language and a thorough  
thoughtfulness to his ars poetica. In this new vol-  
ume, the first to span the forty-four years and  
fourteen volumes of his poetry publications, the  
editor selects the best of the poems, uniting his  
editorial vision of this complex poet with the  
tropes that helped to form it.

Prior to his death in 1991, Nemerov pub-  
lished three novels, two short story collections,