Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Remaining Flexible

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

I remember the excitement I felt when the release of my first book of poems was near. That book, *The Flood* (Tía Chucha Press), had taken me ten years to write, too. The excitement was mixed with a big sense of relief and an enormous sense of doom. I mean, here it was, ten years worth of work, ten years of my life, and surely life was going to find a way to screw me on this!

Fortunately for me, the book release went off without a hitch. And we all lived happily ever after.

This time, I'm sitting on the publisher's side as a poet braces himself for the release of his first book, the fruit of ten years of work. On Monday, we put in the order for a proof copy of our next title, *Eulogy to an Unknown Tree*, the debut collection of poems by LA poet and painter, Billy Burgos. It's a dense, challenging, moving, and deeply personal body of work that took Billy about ten years to put together. And now it's here (after a hiccup with another publisher, which gave WLP an opportunity to pounce on the manuscript).

I originally contacted him early in the year when I'd first heard he was walking away from a publisher. The book was ready to go, in pre-production stages, and he was choosing to sever the deal because of conflicts. At that time, we had our publishing schedule set for '12 and I imagined we could put the book out Spring '13. Billy seemed a bit unsure about waiting til next year, but once we got to talking and realized Writ Large Press had what he was looking for in a publisher, he was all in.

But when one of our originally planned titles got pushed back and since Billy's manuscript was ready, we decided to slot *Eulog*y into November '12, where Mike the Poet's book was originally scheduled. We even announced it at the release event for *History of Butoh*.

Unfortunately, November became mid-December. And last week, after finishing a challenging time designing the book which resulted in another beautiful cover and layout, we had a team meeting, author included. As we were going through available dates at Beyond Baroque, our ideal location for the release and a place where Billy has been hosting a monthly reading, we realized it was too late to find an open night. It's always tough to do anything around the holiday times because weeks get lost to eating and family and travel and such.

So we made one more change and December, which was once November, now became January '13, which is close to what we'd originally planned.

Two things claw at me about all of this:

- We missed our goal of releasing three books this year. You always think this is the year that we meet all of our goals and it's disappointing when that doesn't happen, especially at the beginning of what you hope is a new phase in your journey.
- I feel horrible yanking a writer around all over the calendar. I go back to those days when *The Flood* finally found a publisher and think about how stressful and upsetting it would have

been if things kept on changing on me.

Having said that, there are a couple of things that I feel good about:

• We kept the writer not only in conversation, but a part of the decision making process. I don't know if big publishers are able to do this, to maintain a business plan while being flexible enough to speak to the author about the best plans for the book.
• Ultimately, January is the right date. It coincides with Nick Flynn's reading in Los Angeles. Nick is a dear friend of Billy's and an author Billy holds in high esteem. We are looking into putting together a couple of readings with the two, which should give a first book from a local poet much more press than he could have created on his own. (It also gives Nick time to send us that blurb!)

All in all, plans still moving forward and I feel excited again for *Eulogy to an Unknown Tree*, instead of just feeling anxiety. I still wish we wouldn't have had to keep changing the dates and owe the author an apology for that. But we used the flexibility that we have as a small press to not settle, to find the ideal situation for the book.

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