

John Bennett—Window Cleaner Extraordinaire

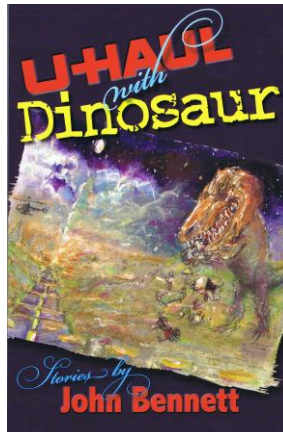
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Known in lit circles as a godfather of small-press publishing — John Bennett just launched *U-Haul with Dinosaur*. It's no less than his 37th work in print, not to speak of the dozens of authors — acclaimed and obscure — he has published under Vagabond and other imprints dating back to the 1960s. The title connotes a return to ground-hugging basics, a short story assemblage taking liberties. Its stripped-down embrace of the American underclass draws from Steinbeck, Kerouac, and Bukowski. Here the latter appears as Jablonsky ["The Party to End All Parties" – pg 81], "settled in for the duration with a bottle of whiskey and a cigar, his eyes hooded, that slight smile on his lips."

Bennett describes himself in a Bio Note, "For the past thirty years he's earned his living as a window cleaner." This trade keeps him fed and housed. It's challenging enough in the Ellensburg, Washington whorl of seasons to keep him fit, perching him at windows in that Rodeo Town community as a working class observer and occasional recorder of the locale he dubs Harmony.

A river runs through this trim "The Branding Iron was full of people putting down the beer. The place was thick cloud just inches above the tallest

A Viet Nam vet tries to prop up his about suffering," Truck said, "is to learn much suffering will drive you insane." interesting. "Suffering is in the mind," he worst suffering I did wasn't when I got after, when I was out of the hospital and quarterback in high school." Then he took said, "I still long for things I can't have. Different things maybe, but that doesn't matter. It's the longing you have to deal with."



volume — of liquor of course. feeling no pain, shooting pool and thick with smoke that hovered in a man's head ["The Old Values" – pg 59]. barriers: "The important thing how to get away from it — too And then he said something said ["The Old Values" – pg 65], "The my leg and arm blown off, it was had to adjust. I was an all-state a hit from the Jack Daniel's and

In *U-Haul* survivors struggle to exorcise unrequited passions, ghosts, fantasies. "He had this recurring dream of a flag-draped coffin with the remains of an unknown soldier, and etched into the rim of the coffin were the words *Made in China*" ["The New World Order" – pg 30]. "Having kicked the booze, pot, and drugstore highs," James wanted to know "why he was filled with dread. He tried posing these questions to his father, but his father kept on polishing the stock of his gun without saying a word" [pg 28]. As the twosome bores deeper, "when James dug into the raw wound of his mind and tossed out some facts about all the lying and corruption, his father just smiled and held his pleasure to the light, sighting down the scoured and ready barrel" [pgs 31-2].

Bennett has shuffled his deck carefully, dealing out case studies, neo-mythic tales, the down and dirty right aside heightened idealism. "Giovanni might have thought twice before volunteering to help move Katherine across the state to a mining town in Pend Oreille County, but it never occurred to him that she could have so much stuff, what with her schizophrenic son Timmy setting fire to her apartment on a regular basis... But Katherine had memories that she clung to, memories embedded in things, and these things were piled high in a third-floor storage unit in Seattle's warehouse district ["U-Haul with Dinosaur" – pg 5].

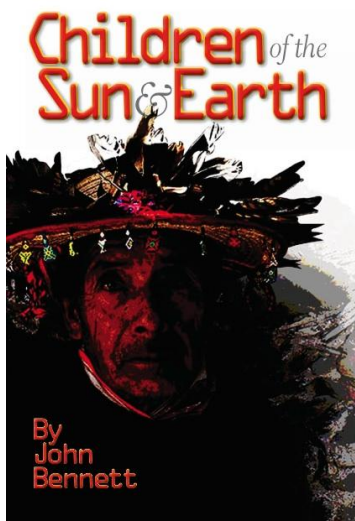
For Katherine is ripe for change, the same having already swept her from Kansas through Chicago to Hollywood, San Francisco, motherhood twice, Portland, Seattle, Bellingham and now the far reaches of Eastern Washington. “I am making the right move! This is a new beginning, a crossing over.”

“Yes,” said Nancy. “Believe it! Believe it with your whole heart, Kate!” [pg 7]



In *U-Haul with Dinosaur*, John Bennett cuts through the crap to clean America’s panes, exposing it and us to light. He probes for a pulse, finding us numbed but frequently, righteously angry. His characters respond variously, from hints of raw-boned violence to healing dreams. As the book wraps [“TIRT” – pg 136], Wounded Knee projects himself “on the slopes of a slumbering volcano, deep in a cloud forest, in search of the illusive resplendent trogon.”

Written from the seventies into our new millennium, these slices show love’s “gone haywire” in the U.S. His vivid cast — featuring Jablonsky, Maggie White Whale, Tall Jimmy, Spyboy, Chantilly / Cassandra, Paco, Wart, The Smiley-faced Fool from Cincinnati, Spunky and company — fights, frolics, searches for elusive freedom, or yearns for home. It’s an energizing introduction to the wide-ranging Bennett precincts. Then again, this memorable troupe got 86’d far too fast.



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