

Basso, Eric  
CATAFALQUES—Poems 1987-1989 [pointer]  
Asylum Arts (192 pp.)  
\$13.00  
November 1999  
ISBN 1-878580-09-4

A short story writer, poet, dramatist, and essayist, Eric Basso has contributed work to *Chicago Review*, *Collages & Bricolages*, and *Exquisite Corpse*, among other magazines. Readers familiar with those publications will have an immediate sense of Mr. Basso's poetic "flavor." There is much more to his idiom, however, than mere technical condiments masking an insipid text. These poems are truly substantial and, as is too rarely the case with modern verse, their essence is more than their expression. The rhythms of his poetry are absolutely natural, not constrained by intellectual fashion or sustained by gimmickry. The ear of the critically-acclaimed dramatist is evident in these verses where spoken, not merely printed, language is inherent in the cadences and textures. The poems are simple in phrasing, yet nearly mythic in proportion. They are at once magical and ceremonial and musical, so that reading them aloud becomes the reciting of incantations. As is implied in the title of this, his fourth, collection, *Catafalques* deals with loss and leaving, with the transitory nature of human existence. But the poet's is not an empty universe, nor his voice an existential caterwauling. The images, while often foreboding, are also haunting and touching, at times even humorous. Every evening at dusk, a once-beautiful woman's song enchants an entire village, but when she dies they are unable to recall a single note and the village itself passes into obscurity.

Basso's is a poetry of celestial mechanics, of mysteries still, and forever, unfolding. Rather than a barren defiance, his vision becomes a fruitful collaboration with the cosmos in the manner of the Navajo shaman who each dawn helps sing the wondrous world into existence.