FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Homage to Longshot O'Leary
Reginald Gibbons
Holy Cow! Press
978-0-930100-85-8
(September 30, 1998)

In the first section of this new book of poems, Homage to Longshot O'Leary, Reginald Gibbons explores his life and times, aware of the small, tender moments, but willing to grab for the mythical or political, or both—see "The Hell of the Enchanters for Hire." These poems also reveal Gibbons sharp insights and his brilliant (but by now well-known) abilities at sound and form. Suspected, however, that despite the strength of such poems as "Shores" and "Message to be Put Inside a Bottle" it is the single long poem of his second section that will put this book on the poetry map.

This skilled and enlightened piece, inspired by the late poet, Thomas McGrath, might have been titled after the 1987 issue of TriQuarterly which Gibbons himself edited—"Thomas McGrath: Life and the Poem"—in which Gibbons courageously published essays, interviews and a tasty selection of McGrath's lush poems. First through the allusion to McGrath in the title of this new collection, and then through direct references, the reader quickly discovers Gibbon's reverence for McGrath, as well as his ability to reconstruct and extend the man's ideals through his own poem.

In American poetry perhaps one of the most critically unrecognized but deeply loved poems of the later part of this century is McGrath's "Letter to an Imaginary Friend," a long frolic into American idiom, populist ideals, and—despite his wit—the tragic view of his own life and times. Now, in Homage Gibbons borrows heavily from both McGrath's essays and interviews but also from the actual format of this poem in order to answer McGrath's voice with his own dark and tender perspective. Using McGrath as a springboard, Gibbons takes McGrath one step further—for example, broadening McGrath's landscapes to include "Our New World ruins/ Empty factories, scorched/shops and businesses in the districts/of the leveraged take-overs and the riots/…" Using a mixed genre approach, Gibbons masterfully shifts from prose reflections to poetic responses about McGrath's deeply felt working class, socialist values.

This artful, literary tribute is what we have needed to remind us of McGrath's rich and unique voice, but it also reveals Gibbons? courteous awareness of how poets build new and

important work from the foundations of earlier poets. This text is significant because it will re-connect readers to McGrath's life as well as introducing new poems by Gibbons.

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