FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Unsleeping: Poems
Michael Burkard
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Burkard's somewhat elliptical, somewhat surreal poems have been teasing readers for over twenty years; one doesn't go to them for meanings or stories or language experiments, but for a succession of domestic perspectives that tip the familiar into uncharted territory. Here, as in his previous collections, he seems to be following the lead of John Ashbery in chronicling the mundane rendered confusing by its huge cast of characters, conflicting actions, and interminable length. Nevertheless, the ninety-year-old father, the problematic brother, a familiar seascape, friendships, and daily patterns enclose these poems in an intimate space. They feel personal, even when readers have no idea why this is so.

Proceeding frequently by anaphora or by lists, Burkard's work here can have a whiff of the writing exercise about it, a sense that some veins of inventiveness have been exhaustively mined. "No purple. / No cows in the sky. / No cars in the sky with or without drivers. / No sex. / No orange (too much orange lately). / No teeth (they might bite)," begins a poem called, emphatically, "NO."

More ambitious and successful is the closing sequence, "Notes about My Face," which revisits themes sounded earlier in the book-such as doubleness, family anger and destructiveness, Burkard's identity as a writer and reader, his many friendships-placing them in tantalizing proximity to each other. The connections that are made possible in poems like this one highlight what Burkard is best at: letting his observations raise questions for himself (and for his readers), instead of packaging a static poetic vision.