

Jim Elledge

As a poet, Jim Elledge's focus has been experimentation, especially experimentation with genre. He explores the territory that exists—often uncomfortably—between the traditional and the postmodern, acknowledging such forms as the sonnet or such prosodic devices as allegory but turning them on their heads. For example, his *The Chapters of Coming Forth by Day* (2002) is a novel in prose poems, that at once recognizes and employs the narrative element that is traditionally associated with the novel but which relies on the absurd, the nonlinear chronology, etc. often associated with the prose poem. In his most recent book, *A History of My Tattoo* (2006), a book-length poem, he takes on the epic, giving it a decidedly modern twist by employing as “hero” a drag queen. Known in the book as The Twentieth Century, she is a former soldier in Viet Nam now living with AIDS. He has recently completed a biography in prose poems, *The Book of the Heart Taken by Love*. Relying on fiction as often as fact, it chronicles the life of novelist/outsider artist Henry Darger. A much-abbreviated version of the book will be published in the summer of 2007 by Woodland Editions as *The Book of the Heart Taken by Love: 19 Selections*.

While conducting research on Henry Darger, Elledge decided to write a biography of Darger because he had recognized in the painter's canvasses elements that others had ignored. Earlier scholars had characterized Darger as a pedophile, a sadist, and a mass murderer, but Elledge's research disproves all previous assumptions and reveals that Darger had a secret and that he borrowed cultural codes for his paintings and novels to reveal that secret and to communicate it to others. Tentatively entitled *Sweetie Pie: The Guilt and Redemption of Henry Darger*, the book belongs not only to “biography,” but also to cultural studies, U.S. history (especially Chicago history) from approximately 1890 to 1940, queer studies, art history, and English studies.

Elledge is at work on two other projects. *The Season of Mascara* is a collection of free-verse poems, experimental sonnets, and prose poems that, taken as a whole, give a portrait of the anxiety that permeates post-9/11 life. The book has grown out of Elledge's experiences while living in New York during and after the attack on the World Trade Center. He is also engaged with translating work by early modernist gay poets from the Iberian peninsula: Federico García Lorca, Fernando Pessoa, Adriano del Valle, Manuel Altolaguirre, Luis Cernuda, and Juan Gil-Albert.

His other interests are most easily summed up by a list of some of his other recent books: *Masquerade: Queer Poetry in America to the End of World War II* (2004), *A Student's Guide to Getting Published* (2002), and *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Myths from the Acoma to the Zuñi: An Anthology* (2002).