

The subject of ethnicity comes up only briefly in a few of the pieces, and then only as incidental detail as Soto chooses to dwell on literary matters and not sociological ones. In "The No-Guitar Blues" the protagonist ponders a lost dog's social status: "He saw that it was sort of a fancy dog, a terrier or something, with dog tags and a shiny collar. And it looked well fed and healthy. In his neighborhood, the dogs were never licensed, and if they got sick they were placed near the water heater until they got well." When he returns the animal to the owners, the young man is amazed by the "house with its shiny furniture and a television as large as the front window at home." Soto draws other comparisons between the Chicano world and the Anglo one, but he is too fine a writer to focus extensively on social justice (or the lack thereof). His subjects are young people grappling with universal problems of youth, and their social status is not really important. What is important in the stories in this collection is the author's presentation of very real human beings and his sympathetic and warm tone. The young characters can be described as lifelike, humorous, affectionate, mean, scheming, anxious or afraid, and always believable and likeable. The book is a pleasure to read.

—Carl R. Shirley
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Gary Soto. *Who Will Know Us?* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990) 69 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Gary Soto is one of America's finest poets, a writer whose previous collections (*The Elements of San Joaquin*—1977, *The Tale of Sunlight*—1978, *Father Is a Pillow Tied to a Broom*—1980, *Where Sparrows Work Hard*—1981, and *Black Hair*—1985) have received wide critical acclaim, not only from Chicano critics but from others as well. In this latest volume Soto again demonstrates that he is an accomplished literary craftsman with a great deal to say. The forty-one poems are presented in three untitled sections and range from pensive reflections on old age and death to poetic accounts of seemingly trivial daily activities. Chronicle Books, in its first foray into the field of poetry, is to be congratulated for this handsome volume, printed on fine paper and with a lovely cover illustrated by Scott Sawyer.

The majority of the poems are serious and thought-provoking, but the fourteen in the first division stand out as fine examples of somber, yet lyrical verse. "A Red Palm" is a long apostrophe that documents the routine of a bone-weary farmworker, and "Another Time" presents a longing image of a dead father. "Eve" deals with a young couple's first sexual encounter, while "Moses" evokes a beautiful, loving memory of a dog the poet has previously portrayed with great affection in one of his

prose volumes, *Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets*. The last poem in the first portion is about death, finishing with the book's title line, "Who will know us when we breathe through the grass?"

The second set of verses contains sixteen pieces that are just as serious in nature as those in the first, yet here the poet occasionally deals with lighter matters. "Target Practice," for example, describes an afternoon two boys spend shooting rifles at cans and bottles. Soto's skillful hands make the poem spring to life so the reader hears the reports of the guns, senses the fear of the canine companion, and smells the gunpowder. The poetic voice returns often to more serious themes. In "Learning My Lesson," the young narrator first comprehends danger and death. "Small Town with One Road" is a reflection on what life would have been like if a person who makes his living with "only words" had instead been forced to work outdoors and with his hands, "a hard life where the sun looks."

The third division has a few more personal poems, especially in that the reader familiar with Soto's entire corpus of prose and poetry will sometimes be on familiar ground. "Our Days" is a family portrait of Saturday activities and "Evening Walk" describes a man and his daughter's shared outing. But the voice persistently returns to a thread running throughout *Who Will Know Us?*--death--as it does in the final section "Ars Poetica, or Mazatlan on a Day When Bodies Wash to the Shore." In *Who Will Know Us?* Soto once again demonstrates that he is both technically and thematically a highly-skilled poet. Gary Soto's previous work is excellent and praiseworthy, but his latest collection contains poetry that is brilliant, resonant, lucid, highly evocative, and immensely satisfying.

—Carl R. Shirley
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Jon Michael Spencer. *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987) xvi, 160 pp., \$29.95.

In his latest book to date, *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*, Spencer states in the introduction that there are seven musical elements that make up the "chanter sermon" and these include melody, rhythm, call and response, harmony, counterpoint, form, and improvisation. He not only states that these musical components appear in the chanted sermons, but he illustrates how they are manifested in the sermon event through sermons and/or testimonies of white male and female observers, ex-slaves, ministers, and scholars of black preaching.