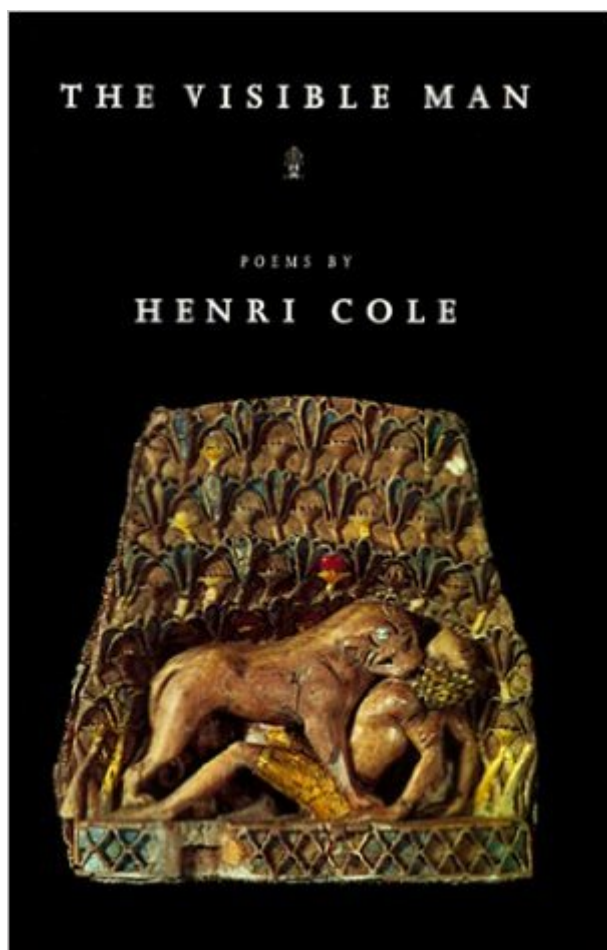


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The Visible Man: Poems



Synopsis

Praised by Harold Bloom and many other critics and poets for his earlier collections, Henri Cole has grown steadily in poetic stature and importance. "To write what is human, not escapist," is his endeavor. Now he pursues his aim by folding autobiography and memory into the thirty severe and fiercely truthful lyrics--poems presenting a constant tension between classical repose and the friction of life--that make up this exuberant book. On being awarded the Rome Fellowship in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Henri Cole received the following citation: "In a poetry nervously alive to the maladies of the contemporary, yet suffused by a rare apprehension of the delights of the senses, Henri Cole has relished the world while being unafraid to satirize it. In poems that are both decorative and plain-spoken he permits his readers to share a keen and unsentimental view of the oddities, horrors, and solaces surrounding them at the end of the twentieth century."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[This book brief appeared March 11, 1999, in Seattle's "The Stranger" and can be found online at [\[...\]](#)Cole does to the sonnet what postmodern consciousness does to the self--he wrenches it, shatters it, sucks it dry, turns it inside out, and sometimes, for a moment, holds it in a quiet embrace. The central problem of his book is knowledge, which made Apollo a god but divides us from ourselves. Cole seeks to unite body and mind in a self through Arte Povera poems - rough, impromptu works "in motion, / stroking toward what [he] cannot see" ('Apollo'). But the self proves to be neither a temple for the spirit nor a sturdy Greek column, and Cole becomes a tourist and

connoisseur of his own disintegration -- he is marble rubble, broken stanzas, stray glimpses of porn flicks, bouts of loveless fellatio under the pier. The poet is a Visible Man in what he calls an "erotic x-ray of my soul" ('Self-Portrait as Four Styles of Pompeian Wall Painting'). Though Cole refuses to flatter us with sweetness, he can be very funny, mingling exquisitely precise imagery with comic observation. Ancient crumbling statues resemble "bodies sinking in quicksand," but "a luckless prick / is frozen in the stucco." Scholars "eat big bowls of pasta / and drain their preposterous bowels" ('The Scholars'). Many passages are marvelous - history has "white teeth / jammed with gristle" ('The Black Jacket'); forgiveness is "so hard to swallow it unshackles us" ('26 Hands'); a house is "illuminated all night, / like the unconscious, though no one enters" ('The Coastguard Station'). Cole is determined "To write what is human, not escapist."

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