is always something / besides our
own misery.”

Mary Adams
University of Louisiana at Monroe

Li-Young Lee. Behind My Eyes. New
$24.95 ISBN 978-0-393-06542-8

This newest collection of thirty-nine
poems by Li-Young Lee is com­plete
with a CD recording of the
author reading each of the
poems, its running time 1:13:12. Lee is one of
those few living poets who are excel­lent
readers of their own work, the
majority being either too restrained,
mannered, or simply unpracticed in
the performance of poetry (theirs or
that of others).

That said, perhaps one of Lee’s
most attractive qualities is his poetic
voice (as distinguished from his
reading voice). In fact, “voice” is a
recurrent concern and subject in this
book: even the first poem, “In His
Own Shadow,” ends with “while all
bodies share / the same fate [death],
all voices do not.” This book posits
early on the possibility that “voice”
could possibly survive the fate of the
body. But how can one speak in the
face of inexpressible joy and grief?
And if one does manage somehow to
do so, then in what manner, tone, or
register? from what vantage point?
Of course, most fundamentally the
voice might witness—that is, read
or pronounce one’s experience in
“Become Becoming” we read “Then
you’ll remember your life / as a book
of candles, / each page read by the
light of its own burning.” But Words­worth tells us that poetry is half-perceived, half-created, and Lee’s work
accordingly reflects on experiences,
interrogates the unknown, searches
what is or has been for revelation or
even sometimes just for the correct
next question. The “voice” has more
to do than witness.

The meditation on voice con­tinues in the book’s longest poem,
the five-part “The Lives of Voice.”
In this poem, the bird, in particu­lar the mourning dove, serves as a
trope for the poet or the poet’s voice.
Although this is a common trope,
most famously used by Whitman in
“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rock­ing,” Lee develops and extends the
trope in original ways. A voice must
be authentic, unprotected, unshield­ed perhaps, he seems to say: “What
do you mean a voice walks barefoot
/ among the names of things?” A
voice must endure, survive, even
perfect itself through adversity, he
seems to say: “What do you mean, /
pulled from the fire, a voice thrives,
/ undisguised in open season?” and
“or is this a new bird, / a new page
pressed by winter’s hand, / a new
song creased under winter’s iron.”
A voice must have range and tonal
suppleness: “The dove’s changing
pitch, / now a narrow doorway
to the sea, / now an unheated room
in autumn, / now a sodden bed of
leaves.” There’s more, of course, but
these examples serve.

Overall, Behind My Eyes has
enormous range and originality
in subject and mood; just consider
some of the titles: “My Clothes Lie
Folded for the Journey,” “God Seeks
a Destiny,” and “Virtues of the Bor­
ing Husband.” What lyricism, what
inventiveness, what a delight: read
this book!

Fred Dings
University of South Carolina

Pomegranate Seeds: An Anthology
4-2

Difficult as it is to believe, this is the
first anthology of Greek American
poetry to be published, and it makes
for a unique compilation. Indeed, in
terms of richness and variety, this is
an incomparable volume. Its editor
should be congratulated for an out­
standing selection.

It includes forty-nine living
authors who were born in the Un­
ited States, Greece, and Cyprus. Some
were born in the States and raised
in Greece, others the opposite, but
now they all live in America. While
a few write in Greek and most write
in English, they are all intensely
aware of the Greek language. That
language is heard in many pieces
in a variety of registers (from col­
loquial to learned) and periods (clas­
sical, Byzantine, and modern). It can
be the language of ancient thought,
the Orthodox Church, or contem­
porary journalism. Poems draw on
poet Korinna, philosopher Heracli­
tus, historian Thucydides, the New
Testament, and many other Greek
sources.

Especially impressive is the dia­
logue of the Greek Americans with
poets of the last two centuries who
wrote in Greek, such as A. Kalvos,
Penelope Delta, C. P. Cavafy, G. Seferis, O. Elytis, Y. Ritsos, and M. Sachtouris. It is not an accident that many of the latter belonged to the Greek diaspora as well, coming from places like Alexandria and Smyrna. In addition to the diaspora, the landscape of the book spans the entire Greek geography, from the mythical Olympus and Hades to the modern Missolongi and Kalamata. In it, the islands figure quite prominently, from the Ionian Zakynthos to the Dodecanesean Patmos and from Lesbos to Crete. Some historical figures like Aristides, Diogenes, and Alexander make an appearance. However, the part of the Greek heritage that exerts the greatest influence on this poetic corpus is mythology.

Writers are anthologized alphabetically; this unobtrusive order allows readers to enjoy the book from a variety of angles, as it truly deserves to be approached. *Pomegranate Seeds* can be savored by a very broad audience, including followers of poetry, lovers of Greece, students of myth, specialists in the diaspora, and scholars in American studies.

Vassilis Lambropoulos
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

It is hard to make the work of women artists visible in the Balkans. Only in 2006 did a significant number of women poets feature in an anthology of contemporary Serbian poetry—compiled by a woman, Bojana Stojanović Pantović (Nebolomstvo). Almost none of those names is found in an anthology compiled the same year by a man—poet, critic, and editor Gojko Božović—and translated into English (The Place We Love: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry). Consider also that in 2008 a prestigious Serbian poetry award, the Branko Miljković prize, went to a female poet for the third time in its thirty-seven years of existence. The winning poet was Marija Šimoković, aged sixty-one, after thirty-six years of work and eleven books of poetry. *Kinovar* is her most recent work. It is a book of one hundred poems, arranged to show the enchanting process of transferring and transforming energy that flows between the artists and their inspirations. Throughout the book, the poet joins the dialogue with the work of two painters and a philosopher. Represented by Word, Image, and Thought, respectively, these different figures all speak of a greater whole: Art. Poems range from long narrative episodes to aphorisms and the shortest riddles; they circulate and overflow with quotations, footnotes that include more poems, and drawings of Mihailo Đoković Tikalo’s Twelve Alchemical Works on the Matter (which show how the inspiration of two artists mutually enriched each other). *Kinovar* is thus more than poetry; it is a dramatic piece as well.

The drama of the work comes from the artist’s underlying motive—that of searching for the truth. Šimoković does so through the continuous process of forming and transforming images and thoughts, as alchemists once did in their search for the perfect element. An allusion to this mystical discipline is in the title of the work. *Kinovar* is an alchemical substance used for transforming metal into gold. Alchemy is also present in the way Šimoković uses ontology, mathematics, Greek mythology, and its symbolism to create something new—a piece of art unique in form and content.