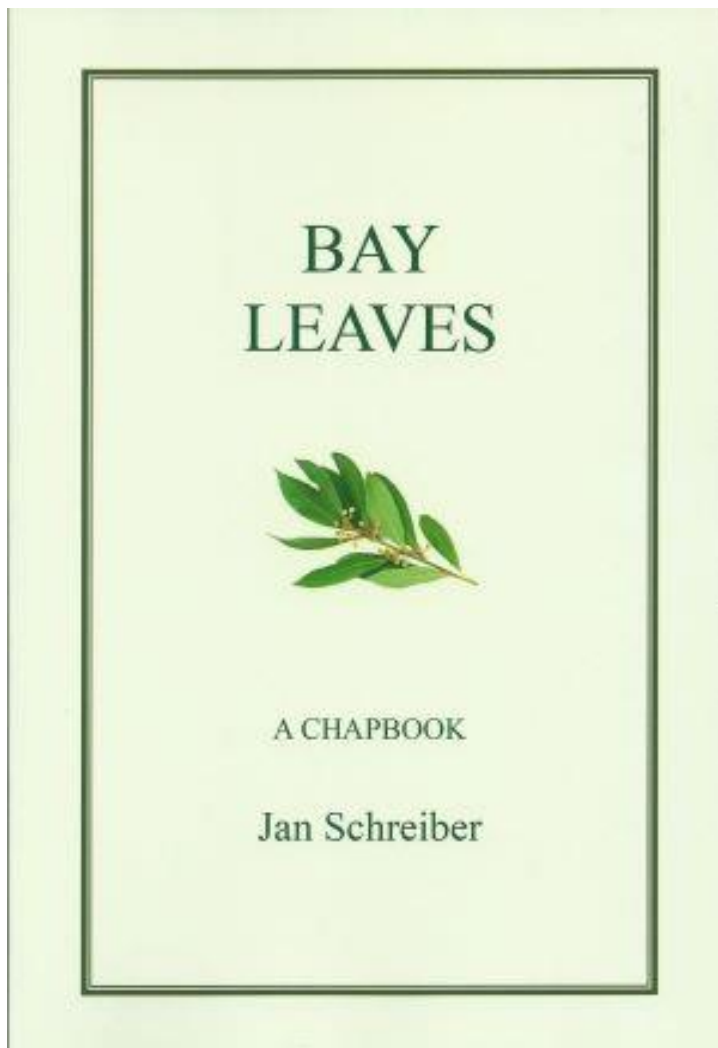


# A TENT OF WORDS

REVIEW BY

**FREDERICK TURNER**

---



*Bay Leaves*

by Jan Schreiber

Kelsey Books, 2019

Sometimes just a voice will do it: rational, aware, detached, compassionate, unassuming yet assured, unconsciously charming, grownup, quietly hilarious, as serious as death.

The yammerings of the internet and the newsflash fall away, the hysteria, the self-stimulated outrage and hatred. Before that level gaze, that unperturbed yet deeply engaged art, no falsity and fake drama can endure.

Jan Schreiber's voice certainly has tones in it from Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens—even Yeats, Donne, Ronsard, Du Fu. But it's quite distinct, a gentle irony that misses nothing, just bitter enough to make you remember and miss the taste and want to pick the little book up again.

It's a little book, *Bay Leaves*, but it has the heft of a big one. It has two of the best father poems I know, one with a terrifying Abraham figure whom one somehow loves, the other with an inattentive ghost. It has the best summation of the Vietnam War, achieved after all these years, in the form of a Browningsque dramatic monologue. Its epigrams have juice and bite. Its nature poems have the precision and depth of real biology, so that the pathetic fallacy of nature conforming to human feelings is suddenly

no fallacy at all. Its love poems, amazingly, do not boast, unlike virtually every other ever written. It does a better hatchet job on metaphysics than the most dismissive philosophers, while somehow retaining what is indispensable about religion, its gratitude, its sense of miracle.

And formally it is beautiful. This reader already feels some of its lines (its lines are real lines) lodging themselves in memory for some unconscious use in the future. Schreiber has dispelled my skepticism about the trimeter and reassured me in my guilty liking for the consonantal half-rhyme.

True poetry is like a tent you can put up in a storm, that will keep you safe and dry, a little home. *Bay Leaves* has good tent pegs and does not drip on the inside.