CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 65 *CutBank 65*

Article 43

Winter 2006

Short Reviews

Nathan Bartel

Nabil Kashyap

Joshua Corey

Gina Myers

Sandra Simons

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Bartel, Nathan; Kashyap, Nabil; Corey, Joshua; Myers, Gina; Simons, Sandra; Clay, Adam; Pataky, Jeremy; Silliman, Ron; Tynes, Jen; Lemon, Alex; Sachs, Carly; Losse, Helen; Eason, Haines; Blair, Chad; Slease, Marcus; Ameel, Britta; and Dombrowski, Chris (2006) "Short Reviews," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 65 , Article 43.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss65/43

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Short Reviews

Creators

Nathan Bartel, Nabil Kashyap, Joshua Corey, Gina Myers, Sandra Simons, Adam Clay, Jeremy Pataky, Ron Silliman, Jen Tynes, Alex Lemon, Carly Sachs, Helen Losse, Haines Eason, Chad Blair, Marcus Slease, Britta Ameel, and Chris Dombrowski

This review is available in CutBank: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss65/43

Fourteen Short Reviews

Nathan Bartel on Aase Berg • Nabil Kashyap on Ange Mlinko • Joshua Corey on Shanna Compton • Gina Myers on Jeni Olin • Sandra Simonds on Geoffrey Nutter • Adam Clay on Jen Benka • Jeremy Pataky on Suzanne Buffam • Ron Silliman on Forrest Gander • Jen Tynes on Kate Greenstreet • Alex Lemon on Ted Mathys • Carly Sachs on Dara Wier • Helen Losse on Anne Marie Macari • Haines Eason on Kevin Connolly • Chad Blair on Jane Miller • Marcus Slease on Dan Machlin • Britta Ameel on Christine Hume • Chris Dombrowski on W.S. Merwin

•

Remainland by Aase Berg, Action Books

Reviewed by Nathan Bartel

It is inaccurate for us to say that a shell held to the ear sounds like the ocean; rather, the sound we hear is a lack of a body, a body that inhabited an ocean once, and the sound that lack makes resembles its former habitation. To hear the ocean we need only remove the shell and listen, for we are most likely on a shore; but it is exactly the resemblance, uncanny in its many removes, that compels us to put a shell up to the ear. From this we may make a rough connection to Aase Berg's *Remainland*. Berg's poems seem to deal in apophasis, a distinct silence borne of once (and perhaps future) presence. Neurologists tell us that as information passes along the nervous system the neurons make a sort of path; the more those paths are used, the more defined the path becomes. It makes its form resembling, in a totally foreign way, the information it carries, thereby creating a sort of recognizable but wholly independent echo. Berg's poems operate in a similar way. The body's business is examined not in its products but in the impressions left upon the loci of creation; "Smelt," in its entirety, reads "Carry my smelt / across hard lakes / carry my way of / pouring runny body // Your shell's meaty darkness." There is the echo of meat, of habitation; there is activity's imprint, which we recognize in ways that seem to transcend "sense." This, truly, is "Remainland," a place of formers, of a past tense present and, in a turn that is at once cold as science and compassionate as care, accounted for. Berg's genius is her willingness to

turn her whole attention to these quieted and oftentimes marginalized parts of selves, those paths and pieces and molds at rest, which resonate a barely discernable and completely compelling synesthetic experience of—what else can we call it?—silence.

•

Starred Wire by Ange Mlinko, Coffee House Press

Reviewed by Nabil Kashyap

Reasons to be friends with Ange Mlinko: 1) Her prowess with an exclamation mark; 2) Things you could learn about European earthenware; 3) Number of countries visited in a single collection (15, conservatively); 4) Solace after the devastating theft of Cellini's *Salt Cellar* three years ago. *Starred Wire* manages several cosmos of references–from extensive travel to Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography to personal friends–never succumbing to diffusion. The poems are tonally impeccable, even through occasionally jarring flourishes. Ideas and images aren't satisfied with staying put, tending to resonate symmetrically later on. The thrust of the book, sparked from the first page, is a meticulous battle with problems of containment. From semiotic issues and deep word play to colonially-twinged touristic reverie to pottery, paintings and museums to the brain itself, we are aware of worked, filigreed surfaces with careful spaces left to glimpse inside where the poem admits "I am no longer certain what music I want to hear" or attempts "The Idea in its manger." In addition to an acute sometimes aching awareness of the abstractions she's tackling, Mlinko also pulls off dazzling, smaller delights like "Grass vests the dirt lest wind, twanging the skyscrapers// that merely sleeve the elevators" or "Schoolkids jumping the jellyfish fences/ wearing cranberry jackets." I admire the collection's precision, especially in light of such a broad palette, but the book leaves me a little cold. While there's a great deal of pleasure following her gymnastic wit and inventiveness, I find myself drawn to the interstices where "The painting at the heart of evening dries slowly," which appear too rarely. Still, *Starred Wire* enviably navigates the precious and impersonal with playful intellect. Mlinko's poems admonish that "certainly we don't want to anthropomorphize the brain," that it is a constructed scaffolding under which to wander curiously "where shadows feint across paths fallen trees."

Down Spooky by Shanna Compton, Winnow Press

Reviewed by Joshua Corey

If melancholy is the index of authenticity in American poetry, then Shanna Compton's *Down Spooky* is a very inauthentic book indeed—or as Compton writes in "My Huge Napoleon," "Violators of these depth prescriptions / may be unsubscribed. But does it matter? / He'll mature into silliness." She is that rare creature, an exuberant minimalist: though few of her poems are longer than a page, they are compressed and crammed with wordplay and wit. The first line of her bio says it all, really: "Born and raised in Texas, Shanna Compton has lived in Brooklyn, New York since 1995." She combines West and East, bringing an acute sense of place (places, rather: the Duane Reade and the BQE; St. John Parish in Louisiana and a high school band parade in Texas) reminiscent of C.D. Wright. But like Wright (or Caroline Knox, who contributes a blurb to the back cover), Compton's truest allegiance is to words and their uncanny ability to manufacture a community of meanings out of the barest possible contexts. The speed of her associations produces a kind of delirious whiplash in the reader, as in the case of "Post-Texas Expressive Heat," quoted here in full:

> Your mother put a
> fan in the oven,
> he said, to cool
> it down. That's right
> the door is open
> and on it sits
> a little fan, blowing.
> I am a little
> fan, she says, an
> ardent fan, a big
> fan of yours. *Whew*.

That clever, cartoony "*Whew*" conceals itself behind many of Compton's poems like the quick sly grin of the cat who got the cream. It often seems apt to compare these poems to cartoons and comics: three- or four-panel affairs offering the immediate pleasures of strong lines and good jokes, but rewarding closer examination with the fine detail of their crosshatching and the exquisite syntax ordering the panels. The latter quality is on display in "The Woman from the Public," which alternates a seemingly straightforward confessional narrative in lines of Roman type with incantatory italicized lines,

the whole adding up to a decisive sketch of the risks run by a woman claiming her right to compose "the public." Nervy and syncopated, *Down Spooky* proves that you don't have to prove your seriousness to create authentic experience in language. Or as "My Huge Napoleon" concludes, asking of its titular character, "Why can't he just admit / pleasure is inevitable?"

•

Blue Collar Holiday by Jeni Olin, Hanging Loose Press

Reviewed by Gina Myers

Jeni Olin's first collection of poems, *Blue Collar Holiday*, was a planned one-to-one, image-to-poem, collaboration with the artist Larry Rivers, which was never completed due to Rivers passing in 2002. The images that are collected here seem to serve as jump starts for Olin's corresponding poems which are characteristically fast paced, full of clever turns, wit, and a certain rage, like the rest of the poems throughout *Blue Collar Holiday.* Rushing forward, the poems sometimes open up in a stream-of-conscious-like manner, and always take an unexpected route, turning common phrases into something new and unpredictable. Commenting on White Castle, television personalities, a remaindered Marc Jacobs sweater, movies, Stevie Wonder, life, death and everything in between, the poems feel alive, moving with New York City's traffic, never settling in, often marked with a brazen confidence. "Warner Brothers Newest Thriller Valentine" begins with the line, "Anything I do will be an abuse of somebody's aesthetics." Olin accepts this fact and moves forward in the comfort of not having to please anyone. In "Stickup," she claims to be assaulted by a cohesive mass of confidence and admits to stealing lines, long and thin:

> I choose not to think of it as plagiarism but as "synchronicity" as in:
> Christ was born on a bank
> Holiday & died on a bank
> Holiday & I'm worried about my hedge fund…

The book also contains Olin's previously published chapbook, *A Valentine for Frank O'Hara*, with cover art by Rivers. These poems differ in tone from those in *Blue Collar Holiday*; they are longer, more meditative and sustained

in their subject matter, often centered on loss—the loss of life, ("The Day Allen Died,") loss of relationships, ("Mothers of the Disappeared.") Most notable is the poem "Frank," which quotes O'Hara throughout and borrows his style—a record of "standing still & walking in New York," putting down in verse whatever it is that is happening at the time.

Markedly New York School, *Blue Collar Holiday* is an exciting debut book from a confident poet who is raging on "as such / Against the dying of the light, etc."

•

Water's Leaves and Other Poems by Geoffrey Nutter, Verse Press

Reviewed by Sandra Simonds

Elemental and complex, Geoffrey Nutter's second book is something like the Rubik's Cube that he uses as a recurring image in the poem "Afternoon in Iceland." Like the man toying with that Rubik's cube, the guiding question of the book seems to be, "Will he knuckle under to its vast superiority of combinations?" Nutter's answer? "I'm not much more than a stem / without roots, a thin thing." Each face of the cube, like each city or vast landscape that Nutter inhabits, rootless-stem that he is, gives rise to a world both natural and artificial, continually leaving before our eyes. The following is from "Ferdinand and the Rail":

> Poetry is not a mirror, gentleman, life is not
> A cube-version of a mirror, it is
> Not an expansion of yourself as seen
>
> From outside by all onlookers, including
> You. It disappears, gentle man,
> From your own sight as you move away,
>
> But it goes on, and the image it reflects
> Is glazed by the formless ball of each moment,
> Like sun in the rain.

No, poetry is not a mirror and, as the poet says, it must become a place where

you are "not sure if you are alive" but where you can "hear cold water crashing over stones" because "your life is a great transparency." As one may notice from "Ferdinand and the Rail," the stakes of his poetry are high and rare. To achieve the aforementioned transparency, Nutter proves to be exceptionally attentive to the outside world. In "The Black Dog" he writes, "I saw a black dog come out of a pond / and break into a million light-tipped crystals / as he shook the water from his fur." We have all seen a dog shake his fur, but it takes a talent like Nutter's to turn the image into a sublime one.

•

A Box Of Longing With Fifty Drawers by Jen Benka, Soft Skull Press

Reviewed by Adam Clay

There is a rich tradition of poems that rest on the "idea" of America. Each of these poems acts as a milestone of sorts by marking the end of an era, but they also seek to redefine America as it evolves and adapts. In seeking to document this ever-changing country, Jen Benka takes the Preamble to the Constitution and dedicates a poem to each word. This book succeeds when the poems distance themselves from the sequence itself. Often the shorter poems lean against the poems both before and after them, demanding that the reader be constantly aware of the sequence as a whole, as opposed to simply dwelling on the poems themselves. An example of this occurrence is with the poem, "United," which appears below in its entirety:

> to stand alone together.

The next poem, "States," is a bit longer, though still drawing attention to the fact that these poems are all interrelated. I don't mean to say this is a weakness, but that the shorter poems (and there are quite a few that are four lines or shorter) don't allow the reader to stop, pause, and see the idea of longing (and this is indeed a book of longing) unfold on a microscopic level. Luckily, there is a certain beauty in the starkness that Benka employs throughout the book. "States," reads:

> this land has no name
> not taken, thieves

tracing rivers and t-squares
more borders.

There are many poems that exist both in the sequence and could exist outside of it. "America," the last poem, delves into a catalogue of images and could clearly stand on its own. In the poem, America is

> an unsolved mathematical equation:
> land plus people divided by people minus land
> times ocean times forest times river.

Benka takes the cliché of America as a land of dreams and catalogues a series of "dreams":

> of corn field wheat field tobacco field oil
> of iron cage slave trade cotton plantation
> of hog farm dairy farm cattle ranch range
> of mississippi mason-dixon mountains
> of territories salt lake lottery gold
> of saw mill steel mill coal mind diamond.

In these poems (and in reality), America is no longer a land of dreams but rather a land of industry. We are entering a new age and these poems richly document the idea of longing as it pervades this changing country.

•

Past Imperfect by Suzanne Buffam, House of Anansi Press

Reviewed by Jeremy Pataky

Past Imperfect, by Suzanne Buffam, debuted seven years after she won a prestigious CBC Literary Award for poetry, during which time she generated a satisfying and cohesive collection of work. Buffam's poems chart the territory between despair and joy, where "we have not died yet of hope, // nor its opposite" ("Best Case Scenario"). In the poem "Happiness is Not the Only Happiness," Buffam says, "rue is a sun-loving plant," harkening back to the first poem and transmogrifying with a retroactive pun the starting point she defines for her reader: "I take a little room on the Rue de Seine." From this

rueful stance Buffam sets out, crafting poems which tend toward a compressed narrative style, tempted at times into surrealism. Her even tone and bank of motifs mediates the stylistic swings that occur throughout the book as she switches from free verse to prose poems to the sonnet. Buffam's quest to illuminate her "own private dark" concerns itself with both the grandiose and the miniscule, her lens ranging from the earth's tectonic mechanisms to Jupiter's moons. The poems accrue momentum and lucidity through their calm fixation on the natural and earthly, populating lines with a host of wasps, sparrows, swallows, snow, squirrels, skies, people, dogs, trees, bats, bees, ants. Buffam speculates that "by paying close enough / attention to the garden I might / join it," and these poems provide a record of that endeavor, fruitful despite her proclivity for anthropomorphized representations of the world and its denizens. Although the book is separated into three sections in a seemingly arbitrary manner, the poems call to one another and form a well-wrought web that catches the wonderment and peculiarity of a layered and holographic world. Rooms contain rooms containing rooms, "there are gaps in the sky the sky fills with sky," lovers have lovers, dropped stones punch holes in rivers. Under Buffam's scrutiny, what seems obvious often proves to be simultaneously its own opposite. The world's inhabitants exhibit polarized natures dependent upon one another like light and shadow, emptiness and fullness. These poems are sopping yet tidy, brief but expansive, homeless but grounded, and profoundly satisfying.

•

Eye Against Eye by Forrest Gander, New Directions

Reviewed by Ron Silliman

Forrest Gander and Clark Coolidge are walking arguments for the notion that a young poet would do far better studying geology in college than creative writing. For one thing, it gives one a sense of form that is not at all received from the predictable patterns of previous centuries. For a second, it trains the poet's eye to view the world carefully and not to make assumptions or generalizations. For a third, it offers a wonderful vocabulary, which in turn seems to breed a love for the gaudiest pleasures of diction. *Eye Against Eye* is crafted masterfully from beginning to end, built around four series of poems interspersed with four prose poems Gander calls "ligatures." The key

sequence, "Late Summer Entry: The Landscapes of Sally Mann," illustrates (rather than being illustrated by) ten of her photographs. While Mann's landscapes are misty and impressionistic, quite unlike her photographs of her family, Gander's poetry tends toward the elegant while retaining an ungainly aspect to it – the only equivalent to it in any art that I can think of might be Twyla Tharp's choreography. I trust the awkwardness here—which can turn up even in the most shapely pieces—Gander's concern is always about getting it right, rather than making it fit.

•

Learning the Language by Kate Greenstreet, etherdome

Reviewed by Jen Tynes

As the title suggests, these poems navigate an unfamiliar landscape, a shaky knowledge. The first words of the text, "learning a language is a form of travel," caption a set of dark visuals. Cover and in-text images are details, some distinct, some murky—map-like, tree bark-like, sonogram-like—and all too close, too particular to give us a sense of scope. The poems are also close, conscious of an inability or unwillingness to represent, be map-like. From "This is a traveling song":

> The escaped convict's story is a traveling story.
> The language is full of gaps and problems of tense.
> One time you asked for a sign and found a shell.
> Add one minute for every thousand miles.
>
> We learn to speak by hearing sounds
> and deciding what they mean.

People are dying in these poems—some immediate, some in memory—and time is, as a result, being reconsidered, recalculated. "Math" begins with some prose: "I was telling everybody that I'd done the math, and I figured out that if we all lived to be 70 years old, we'd get to see the year 3000. They all looked at me kind of funny and I realized suddenly that the year 3000 was practically 1000 years from now." Events are remembered by their month or season. Seedpods must be taken into the house, into the sickbed, to be examined for signs of life. Language is unsure of itself. Within the poems there is much

tense-shifting, time-shifting, changes of mind and place, circlings back. From "2 of Swords":

> If we realized the extent to which
> no one understands
> what anybody else really means
> by anything they say, well,
> you'd say we'd all go crazy.
> But aren't we crazy already?

These poems attempt to immerse us in a moment, a sensation, a murky sonogram, but in the end they leave us with "The Interpreter," a poem in which "I knew what each word was ... the little sister dies and no one mentions her again." This sure scope seems less realization than defeat. "This road / It's hard. / It's mud. / Rises / as dust. / We walk on it" is honest, but cold comfort, difficult necessity. "It's hard to quit, / even when it's over." Must we eventually step back?

•

Forge by Ted Mathys, Coffee House Books

Reviewed by Alex Lemon

How should one praise a book that goes for nearly all of it—myth, pop culture, art, sex, and memory—with a riotous beauty and furnace-sculpted lyricism? *Forge*, Ted Mathys' first collection, is a universe of dizzying pleasures, one that achieves a success in almost every poem. From "Mekong, Mohican," in which the speaker senses the Midwestern melancholy of a father driving along Ohio's Mohican River by witnessing river-lightning in Laos, to the "arteries of Kahlo / and the boils of Marx" in "Paused in the Factory of Choice," these poems "spit and somewhere the barn swallows / gather in the hayloft, their eyes burning like anthracite— / all heat, no smoke, no flame; is to be so thermal / to reconstitute the grounds for hope." *Forge* struts and wheels fearlessly, as in "A Whole in the Factory of Null" where a

> ......loaf of sourdough smells
> like sex and sure that sells; so let me rub
> a dandelion under your chin and if

you like butter; no we're not
exactly naked and null, this is fishnet these are chains

But Mathys is not handcuffed by his tendency to spark and roll. Perception and knowledge are woven and shorn with associative vibrancy and intellectual precision in "A Hole in the Fog," a sixteen-page sequence that sits as the "hole" in the five-sectioned *Forge*. In this poetic mix-mastering of memory "The question here is not whether we will or will / not inherit this Earth, it is what to do // with an Earth that has inherited us, " a world where just "The color of this brocade reminds one not / of a tennis ball exactly, but Boris Becker, / the force behind the color." If "A Hole in the Fog," with its lyrical and imagistic twists and turns around the Danube, does glow brighter than the other sections in this debut, this difference cannot be much. Mathys has given us a stunning first book. With *Forge* a reader has opened the kiln door and pressed their lips to a steel-melting language.

•

Reverse Rapture by Dara Wier, Verse Press

Reviewed by Carly Sachs

Typically, an aside (marked by parentheses) is used in a play to allow an actor to speak directly to the audience or to let the audience inside the actor's head. Dara Weir's ninth book of poetry is a book length account of explorers who speak in phrases entirely walled in by parentheses (also the only form of punctuation besides dashes and apostrophes). On the page, the language resembles prose, but after reading several passages, it is clear that looks are the only similarities to prose. Though quite heady, and definitely not for those in it for an easy read, there are many wonderful moments where Weir's playful craft of language emerges: (we'd go hide / in a haystack) (we'd be like needles) (they'd use / us to mend things) (they'd stand us in pincushions). There is something large and gripping—in an era of technology and general unrest Weir confronts "(fears of going to bed at night) / (of ice and music and birds and flutes and money) / (fear of swallowing) (of being wrong) (fear of not) / (understanding) (of missing out on something). And indeed, there is much missed in terms of basic comprehension and connection to much of the

language. However, Weir suggests another use of language here, one in which the voice of the speaker is not able to be determined. Combine that with the fact that the sections are framed with smaller quotes from many other voices: Beowulf, James Merrill, Edmund Spenser, Arthur Rimbaud, T.S. Eliot, John Ashbery, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Walt Whitman, and what you have is a cacophony of speakers, all with various messages (though not easily interpreted) about our era. Weir's *Reverse Rapture* overwhelms us with voice "(intermittent ones) (saluting / another)"—this book is for those who are ready to be overwhelmed and raptured.

•

Gloryland by Anne Marie Macari, Alice James Books

Reviewed by Helen Losse

From the opening poem in her second book, in which Anne Marie Macari states, "Mary's / blood made him: / and nothing / can change it," she never backs down. The female body and bodily functions are examined—image building on image, poem on poem—as she meets her reader in blood, milk, membrane, soup, "wet eyes," abortion, and death. In "Night Feeding" she captures the sensual closeness that only a woman and her neonate can know, "rock[ing] outside of time [yet] toward / a milkless future." She deals with life's meaning through suffering, mothering, and death, taking her reader through a rose-bed and a bordello, from the universal " I didn't ask to be born" to "longing for / goodness, for god." A statue of Mary, "her belly / huge and taut, crisscrossed with blue veins— / heavenly body, swollen breasts, aching back," provides something Macari can call "holy." In her title poem "Gloryland" in the book's second part, "under the bare bulb, no wind through / the dusty curtain," Macari makes peace with her life and, therefore, her death. After experiencing a glimpse of the future, she concludes that to know "how the dead move," she will "take up rowing." In her final poem, "What Will You Feed Them?" Macari speaks, while husking "milk[y]" corn, of the importance of the "food inside the food." She clarifies what she has known all along: what the meaning of female existence is. Pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding have become spiritual experiences for her as they were for Mary. And "when the Complete comes to find me / [asking what she knows He will ask], What did / you feed them?" Macari knows "I've sucked / the bread of this life / but am

never full" is her answer. Yet even more than her intimate, confessional tone, Macari's language captivates. Her syntax and vocabulary make reading her poems easy. The poems in *Gloryland* are smooth and gentle—as tender as a woman's breath—her music heavenly already.

•

Drift by Kevin Connolly, House of Anansi Press

Reviewed by Haines Eason

Connolly continues in *Drift*, his third collection, to mine a vein studded with the surreal. Though, in going along with this impulse, the reader is asked to consider the acting impulse of the bizarre in the most everyday of everyday. Almost no epic here. In fact, some of his best moments are explorations of the quotidian, as in "Swallows" – here a chicken perfecting itself on the grill, beer can in rectum, is the kernel that leads the narrator to still mobile, aerial swallows. Concluding are thoughts on what it is to swallow, etc.:

> Swallow enough anything and it's euphoria. Strangled or
> drowned we all die drunk – no vexed loves, no stowed
>
> slights, just a hole at the top of a column that thunders and
> beckons and brightens, then, tightening, flees the scene.

As with the dodging swallows, Connolly's poems, his turns and images, are muscular compactions, sinuous conglomerations whose moments roll off one another to each end. He can make the leaps and have one soaring ether-bound with no more a start than the ease of an afternoon stroll. However, no matter how good the flight, we still have to leave land. And, we need the locale of the point of embarkation. Slipping about, riding down the neurons into some vat of subconscious, seemingly self-contained goo is grand, but so many pieces of Connolly's collection seem to go too far off into lonesome fields only he knows, leaving the reader guessing at ends which have no apparent start. Other reviews note Connolly's desire to run anti-canon, anti-polish. A fine endeavor, but explore new ground! Though studded with gems, with images so obtuse they cannot help but take any reader "there," *Drift* is equally laden with moments made up, gussied up monotonies better left for the deeper

currents to dispose of. A quite solid collection if only slightly snagged in the current.

•

A Palace of Pearls by Jane Miller, Copper Canyon Press

Reviewed by Chad Blair

Jane Miller's eighth book explores the highly evolved Arab Kingdom of Al-Andalus as a means of addressing imperialism, diversity, America's relationship to European history, and the role of the artist. The book is comprised of a thirty five-poem sequence that weaves in and out of the personal and the historical with the fluidity of an arabesque. In poem 13, Miller writes "this is how terrifying people can start / to sound when things become personal" and in poem 15 "What is it about Americans / we bully the first people we meet" in poem 26 "clouds gather and lower and damp down and down / in full bloom a monsoon is not yet loosed." Miller is a master at the level of the line. All of these poems are double spaced without any punctuation, each line crafted to be its own tense, lyrical statement. Emphasized by the space surrounding each line, one could get lost as if reading a list. So when Miller continues an idea down multiple lines, it becomes visually clear how each thought is a complex of interrelated ideas. These enjambments are often surprising and force a reconsideration of the lyrical whole. This back and forth between the small and the immense in both form and theme spirals the reader through the arabesque. However, each poem ends strangely with its last line in all caps. It seems an odd choice, placing too much emphasis on that last line, making each poem too linear and disrupting the otherwise fluid patterning. The final poem "Coda" is a compilation of each last line. This explicit, preset pattern seems contrary to the project's desire for a personal texturing of the relationship between the self and history. A Palace of Pearls seeks connection in a fragmented world. It is a sensual response to a cynical history.

6x7 by Dan Machlin, Ugly Duckling Presse

Reviewed by Marcus Slease

6x7 continues the Ugly Duckling tradition of provocative poetics and beautiful book making. Machlin uses a constraint of 6 lines with 7 syllables each. The first poem in the sequence anticipates a resistance to these formal constraints. The speaker asks if we can find truth "through a series of mundane / exercises?" This question leads to some important considerations. What is an exercise in terms of poetics? And why is exercise a derogatory term? The first association that comes to mind is "schoolboy exercises"—mimicry via meter and rhyme of canonized literature. This type of exercise is pre-digested. Both the form and content are predictable and do not push at the boundaries of the known. A formula, unless used in a self-conscious way, can deaden both emotional and intellectual responses to art. Machlin's use of form is very self-conscious and fascinating. His book shows us how limits can redraw the boundaries of the possible. Machlin's *6x7* has some affinities with Berrigan's sonnets. They both refresh Renaissance forms and rhetorical devices. Many of Machlin's poems are addressed to a mysterious lady (which is reminiscent of Shakespeare's dark lady). Also like Berrigan, Machlin employs various dictions and rhetorical devices, such as second person and direct address. While Machlin does not use days and dates like Berrigan, his sequence feels occasional. A process of thinking inside a box. Yet, unlike Berrigan, and NY School poetics in general, there is a lack of irony or glibness. The form of each poem in *6x7* might automatically suggest haiku. A world in miniature. But the title of the book also suggests the dimensions of a box and reminds me of Joseph Cornell. Cornell's boxes are objects within objects. The box, or frame, is itself an art object, as well as the various materials inside the box. As a book, *6x7* is a box, but there are also 44 boxes inside. Each box measures *6x7*. In other words, like Cornell, there are frames within frames. *6x7* highlights the materialities of the book and language itself. Ugly Duckling has done an amazing job realizing the form and procedural considerations of Machlin's book. Once you've seen a book from Ugly Duckling, it is very difficult to return to mass trade books. If you've never heard of Ugly Duckling, you're missing out on some terrific book objects.

Alaskaphrenia by Christine Hume, New Issues Press

Reviewed by Britta Ameel

There are 39 poems in Christine Hume's *Alaskaphrenia*, 72 words between "language" and "landscape" in the Oxford English Dictionary, and Alaska is the 49th state at a latitude of 54° 40' N to 71° 50' N and a longitude 130° W to 173° E. Hume counts, maps, mines, names, explores, lists, categorizes as the surveyor of her Alaska-of-the-mind landscape. She surveys not only the literal landscape replete with bears and moose and ice caves, ocean, mountains, planes. Hume surveys the "poetic" language meant to arrange our uncontrollable internal states, our Alaska on the inside, where we "will be a bellwether bomber, you dream-bomb the last place: a dogsled dream, campfire dream, pioneer dream, pioneer, lynx, lynx, lynx."

This surveyed Alaskan consciousness is under-punctuated, grammatically wild, written on scraps of paper edged with fire and water, folded several hundred times to fit in a pocket. Hume has "adopted an Alaskan ear long before; with it, it's not unusual to hear from inside the hammer: stampeded terrain, yea, avalanche." The inside of this hammer sounds, indeed, like avalanche: words shape-shift and metaphors crumble under sound:

> Under these circulations
> You could not wear cirrus the way cows do
>
> Always your mange meant to be smoke
> molting, moonglow

This associational, sound-driven logic (lynx, lynx, lynx) powers the surveyor's 4x4, which explores the transformative nature of consciousness. This particular Alaskan consciousness is ultimately poetic, circular, fractured, though reliant on prosaic and instructional structures: documents like brochures, diagrams, comprehension questions; indices, instructions, explanations, translations, dialogues, do's and don'ts. These are the maps pinned under otherwise confounding experience, and Hume instructs: "If you cannot work the Eskimo yo-yo, you must walk around and create a map inside your muscles. There, a secret heat makes air remember birds. In their flight, your absurd hands go to seed. Only the other day your pacing made something stop sleeping; it made nowhere a shook-out place." And again: "Never let what you think fool you."

The parallel Hume draws between the surveyor's language and poetic language feels at every turn right for complicated consciousness. Yet, what startles most is the fact that both languages are essentially inaccurate, and indeed almost violate the very areas and emotions they are meant to represent. Hume's act of surveying, though, exposes the rich veins of landscape and mind, which, though perhaps inaccurate, are made once again original and exquisite. This reader wouldn't want it any other way, for Hume has

> ...outened the world
> to show you real barenness:
> a void a light
> warps into want and then wants
> until it warps all it glances.

Warp away, Hume, we're with you on this expedition, counting as we go.

•

Migration: New and Selected Poems and *Present Company* by W.S. Merwin, Copper Canyon Press

Reviewed by Chris Dombrowski

"don't lose your arrogance yet... /" Berryman famously tells a young Merwin, "you can do that when you're older / lose it too soon and you may / merely replace it with vanity" ("Berryman"). Author of a stiflingly huge body of work—24 books of poems, 22 translations, 7 prose books—and recipient of countless prizes including the Pulitzer and National Book Award, Merwin asserts with *Migration* that he has lost over the last half-century none of Berryman's requisite boldness, and has found no room in his lines for vanity.

Although a practitioner of formal verse in his early years (Auden selected *A Mask for Janus*—only one poem from the volume is included in *Migration*—for the Yale Younger Poets Prize in 1952) and linked with the Deep Image poets of the 70's, Merwin, who said in a 1998 *Paris Review* interview that "writing is something I know little about," is our indisputably campless master. Here are the first stanzas of two poems written fifty years apart:

TO THE SOUL

Is anyone there
if so
are you real
either way are you
one or several
if the latter
are you all at once
or do you
take turns not answering

*

DICTUM

There will be the cough before the silence, then
Expectation; and the hush of portent
Must be welcomed by a diffident music
Lisping and dividing its renewals;
Shadows will lengthen and sway, and, casually
As in a latitude of diversion
Where growth is topiary, and the relaxed horizons
Are accustomed to the trespass of surprise,
One with the mask of Ignorance will appear
Musing on the wind's strange pregnancy.

The reader less familiar with Merwin's work might wonder which of the poems were published during the Korean War, and which during the current U.S invasion of Iraq. It's curious, anyway, to note how much "Dictum," (1952) with its density, dialogism, and formalistic leanings, resembles a good deal of what's popular in poetry today. "To The Soul," (2005) on the other hand, with its curious, short-lined directness, recalls Neruda's 1954 *Odas Elementales*, many of which Merwin translated.

Appearing in the "New Poems" section of *Migration*, "To the Soul" also shows up in the 134-page volume *Present Company*, a collection of addresses to people ("The Surgeon Kevin Lin"), objects ("Zbigniew Herbert's Bicycle"), places ("That Stretch of Canal"), abstractions ("Lingering Regrets"), and other nouns. Limpid, void sometimes of images, open in their form, many of these intimate pieces show Merwin at his visionary best. But as Louise Gluck has said of her own work, "What begins as vision degenerates into mannerism," and 134 pages of addresses is 134 pages of addresses, even when written by

one of our finest poets. What the reader will likely find most enduring and endearing in these poems is their infinitely generous central-consciousness; they are, like so many of Merwin's poems, offerings: "…I do / not know that anyone / else is waiting for these / words that I hoped might seem / as though they had occurred / to you and you would take / them with you as your own" ("Cover Note").

At the heart of Merwin's work is a pervading sense of connectedness—to an other, be it the reader, a lark, the light in September—that links it undeniably to prayer, though not prayer in the conventional Western sense which, as Merwin has stated "is usually construed as making a connection. I don't think that connection has to be made; it's already there. Poetry probably has to do with recognizing that connection." The ease with which the poet realizes this link, both perceptively and prosodically ("if you find you no longer believe / enlarge the temple"; "every moment/ arrive somewhere") will remain one of his work's many major feats.

Logistically, *Migration's* major feat is its length; at 529 pages, it could have been much longer—the seminal *Second Four Books of Poems*, for instance, totaled 300 pages when originally published. As with all such massive collections, the reader inevitably reaches a point where the poem begin to sound much like ones read a dozen pages previous. There are many occasions in Migration where the poet "look(s) up to see" or is found "at a bright window" where "all at once" something happens, but just when the reader thinks she has the poems' endings—with their often winged- or shadow dappled-hush—pinned, Merwin surprises with something stabbingly ironic like this from "Questions to Tourists Stopped by a Pineapple Field": "do you think there is a future in pineapple".

"What survives of the artist," Renoir said, "is the feeling he gives by means of objects," and while Merwin's objects—birds, light, stone walls, leaves, water, hills—appear recurrently, his range of emotion is limitless. With all its fluidity, grace, and fleetingness, Merwin's poetry reminds us that it is, like the world it bows to, "always beginning as it goes" ("To This May"). In the brief "Memory of Spring" (originally published in *The Carrier of Ladders* and not included in *Migration*), Merwin hints at the privacy and devotion such a poetry requires of its maker: "The first composer / could hear only what he could write".