

## **Divine Margins**

Peter Cooley. Carnegie Mellon University Press: Pittsburgh. 2009.

I heard Tulane professor and poet, Peter Cooley, speak last April at the Gulf Coast Creative Writing Teachers Conference where he was the guest speaker. He said he rises in the dark and writes until the first morning light, then walks along the levee near his home in New Orleans before leaving for work at the university.

It's that early morning and even afternoon light that radiates through many of his poems, as he voices his memories of his parents, who both died within the same year. In this volume of poetry he also grapples with his own spirituality, openly affirming his Christian faith.

Do the "divine margins" offer a space where we might communicate with the dead? Are these margins at the boundaries of our earthly lives? Does natural light offer a spiritual space for divine connections? These questions come to mind as I read through his work.

In the poem, "Blue Ring" he describes the light, as he reminisces about his father and the ring that belonged to him, which he now wears: "...catching the day hard as I go through it in light's huge imperfections, glittering, mastering light, making light all its own." And again it glimmers for us in these lines:

But I have a ring to catch up the day  
Like a little boy with his magic toy.  
I travel light and light is everything.  
On my fist I wear his gift, blue-clenched,  
reflecting heaven some days, some not.

He left me his imperfection to go on.

In "First Light Meditation" he compares himself to the biblical Peter, "...So for you, for me, there had to be a cock crowing three times and then my tears, waiting years to appear, took bodily form as sound, metaphor." And then the morning light brings divine connections to the poet, who writes:

I found, still find, I can cry each morning  
I go out to find the sun beside me,  
companion not yet risen at world's end  
to sun's new body as I'll rise to mine.  
It's just light, the light of the world.  
And I'm just my own Peter, taking it down.

The third part of Professor Cooley's book is an essay titled "Naming-The-Animals-Moments." He sets the scene at the Audubon Zoo, where once again we are surrounded by "the radiant New Orleans light." He paints an impressionistic, luminescent vignette of the late afternoon at the zoo: "The light here is mystical, nimbus around objects; it draws out some glow within them."

But from there he travels back in time, remembering visits to the Detroit Zoo that he took with his mother when he was ten. He describes his fascination with the mysterious tapirs and his

habit of naming all the animals, which he states “was the beginning of my first poems...” Once again he’s there with his mother, holding her hand, visualizing all the details of their afternoons together. But as he returns from memory to the Audubon Zoo, he sees the strange tapir “emerging from the black waters.” Cooley writes: “My mother has brought him forth...” And here again the radiance of the light materializes, as he ends the essay with “...memory of my mother, missing from me again now as the afternoon’s gold light soon will be, an afternoon among afternoons, a string of moments I carry with me.”

Has he been in the “divine margins” for an hour with his mother? Is it possible that such things exist? I’m imagining that the answer could be “yes.”

– Margaret Howard Trammell

## **Magpies**

Lynne Barrett. Carnegie Mellon University Press: Pittsburgh. 2011.

Fans of Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit From the Goon Squad* or Tony Earley’s *Here We Are in Paradise* will enjoy Lynne Barrett’s third collection of short stories, which won the Florida Book Awards Gold Medal for General Fiction. Barrett’s aesthetic blends a wry take on contemporary American culture with a unique awareness of the Florida landscape. Within this book, one is as likely to encounter an overwrought editor as a sink hole, a gossip columnist as a tropical depression.

The setting and the characters of *Magpies* are noticeably of this generation—“Links” is told through a set of hyperlinks, creating the illusion of scanning a web page. This innovation sets up issues about the future of literacy in an increasingly electronic age.

The fast-paced style of modern life is humorously depicted. For example, one of Barrett’s characters is diagnosed by a soon-to-be lover as having “Attention Surplus Disorder,” which he describes as the ability to “keep on through interruptions, delays, [and] sidetracks.” Many of Barrett’s characters are bookish, and they are often juxtaposed against a culture that seems than in a position to value their talents.

This collection is tightly crafted and yet eclectic. “The Noir Boudoir” and “When, He Wondered” possess endless levels, and their meanings can be construed in dozens of ways—murders are hinted at but not proven, or characters have passionate affairs and then simply drift apart. On the other hand, “One Hippopotamus” and “Texaco on Biscayne” provide a much-needed dose of optimism, ending in the birth (or rebirth) of relationships.

“Cave of the Winds,” an abecedarian, evolves stylistically, with each paragraph beginning on a succeeding letter of the alphabet. This pattern mimics newscasters’ practice of naming hurricanes alphabetically. Because Carlos, a devoted husband, develops anxiety about protecting his family from hurricanes, the alphabetic pattern of the paragraphs complements the way that everything about hurricanes begins to invade his life.

*Magpies* will allow you to perceive every aspect of these birds yourself—their acquisitiveness, their greed, their intelligence, their love for objects that have been cast off, their constant chatter. In “The Noir Boudoir,” an ex-cop named Ray Strout searches through the paraphernalia of the departed in an almost Dickensian fashion, and in “Gossip and Toad,”

vitriolic columnist Tally's job is to "gather shreds and twigs of information from which she could shape something." Like the magpie, many characters have an element of the trickster—although they may get away with bad deeds, they are not ultimately rewarded.

All in all, *Magpies* creates a world that is realistic, that does not overwhelm with sentimentality, and that leaves one enlightened, intrigued, and maybe laughing.

-- *Melissa Slayton*

## **Flies**

Michael Dickman, Copper Canyon Press, Port Townsend, Washington, 2011.

Minimalist introverted poet Michael Dickman is identical twin brother to Matthew Dickman, a maximalist extrovert. Both up-and-coming poets have a thirty-something energy and brilliance to be reckoned with and an older brother who committed suicide.

*Flies* disturbed me and exhilarated me. I believe the poet, in these 19 poems, shows vivid snippets of thrill and horror and even gallows humor as he shreds punctuation in his own perfect fragmented style.

The poems reminded me a little of strips of words typed on a line, then pasted to the page, strip after strip, switching gears, doing 180s, pirouetting, then exiting just as dead, flies and fear get to be too much for the artist. And then he picks up again with a darkly comedic line.

But don't take my word for it. Take the poem "Emily Dickinson to the Rescue" as an example.

Dickman starts the three-part visceral poem with visceral imagery and might leave the old guard gasping:

Standing in her house today all I could think of was whether she  
took a shit every morning

or ever fucked anybody  
or ever fucked  
herself

God's poet  
singing herself to sleep

You want these sorts of things for people

Bodies and  
the earth  
and

the earth inside

Instead of white nightgowns and terrifying  
letters

The third part of this poem starts with this kind of unpredictable gyrating dance from the humble to the horrible and ends in transcendence. The voice has tremendous gravity:

Heaven is everywhere  
but there's still  
the world

The world is Cancer House Fires and Brain Death here in America

But I love the world

Emily Dickinson  
to the rescue

I used to think we were bread  
gentle work and water  
We're not

But we're still beautiful

Killing each other as much as we can  
beneath the  
pines

The pines  
that are somebody's  
masterpiece

The vulnerability here is not sweet, is not boring, but is funny, is fearful, earnest anyway.

Dickman's raw confessions left me, as I wrote this review, nauseous. Dead brothers and flies everywhere makes for tough material. And Dickman does say in the acknowledgments of the book, "Many of the poems in this book were written in memory of my older brother, Darin Hull."

So "Black pedals/only black/tricycle" and "flies drop into the water" and "I brush her hair, wave the flies away from [my mother's] eyes" leave me saying to my husband, an *Apalachee Review* chief editor, *These poems are so bleak*. He suggests I take a break from them.

When I return to the book, I know: We need these poems. We need their random thought switches, their rule-breaking one-line stanzas, the subject matter of brutal honesty. Even if I get tired of all the flies swarming in the words.

In "Stations," which implies stations of the cross, Part 13 throws me around emotionally. It's an odd thrill, the way the whirligig at the county fair tosses you physically:

XIV

The little cross is so small that it can fit in the palm of my hand

It can fit in my brain

I didn't think there was room for it anymore on earth but there is room

The streetlights turn from red to red

The traffic stalls

The little cross is here and lies down in the grass the little cross is here and lies down  
in the grass

From red to red

We are the loneliest murderers ever invented

I lie down in the grass

Hammered into love

You will not be able to mistake it

Like cancer in children

You will hear music

And Michael Dickman's poems are shoveling their way towards hope. In "The New Green's" end, part 3, Dickman says midway through to the end:

I didn't know that it would get easier but it does

The rain softly through the last of the branches is your voice

The lights are my pillow

My brother is my mattress

My mother turns off  
the trees  
and

tucks us in

Michael Dickman is easy, clear, interesting. He is impossible, oblique, fascinating. And believe it or not, he might even make you laugh.

*--Mary Jane Ryals*

**When We Where Outlaws: A Memoir of Love & Revolution**

JEANNE CORDOVA. SPINSTERS INK: MIDWAY, FL. 2011.

Jeanne Cordova creates a stunning illustration of life in the seventies at the rise of feminism. Herself a revolutionary, the reader can't help but dive into her world of political activism where lesbian women are a force against patriarchy. This memoir, rich with first hand history, displays the struggles of fighting for a cause and within one's self as women sought equality in work and love, constantly grappling against discrimination.

Cordova's voice is so strong you can't help but admire her as not only a journalist and activist, but also a human able to create vigor out of family hardships and sexism. She charges toward a mission to reclaim the unbalanced power of men, both gay and straight not only for herself but also for her sisters everywhere. She relentlessly aims for an equal future for both men and women despite resistance and the emotional instability of her personal life.

As a lover, Cordova is dominate and enticing but not without debacle. Spending most of her life in non-monogamy, popular among lesbian feminist during the period, we are touched to see her love so deeply for the first time that she wishes to put The Cause down and indulge in a domestic relationship with a new activist, Rachel. But despite great effort and devotion to Rachel, Cordova can't put her cause down, giving us more respect for her iron resolution.

Rejoining humanity, westbound on the freeway back to Hollywood, I thought about my mistakes of the last year, both the political and personal ones. I should have seen the core contradictions in my relationship with Rachel. When we began dating I'd asked her to join *The Tide*, my baby—my first and greatest love—yet she had said no to co-parenting. She didn't understand, or accept, that the movement would always come first in my life. No, passion was not enough to sustain a relationship. Another bitter, but inevitable reality. It was best that she'd left. I could never have chosen between the two.

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Too often we take for granted what others have done for our freedom. Both men and women are indebted to these courageous outlaws, willing to risk anything it takes to sustain the hope for a better future. This memoir not only gives voice to these women, the moves they made, and the challenges they faced, but it also paints them with a realistic glow. It tells us how they were *living*, gives them a human identity torn by emotion. A gem of insight, men and women both should read *When We Were Outlaws*, a tale of courage and strength and the wisdom of love.

—Amanda McCormick

### **The Animals Beyond Us**

Michael Hettich. New Rivers Press: Moorhead, Minnesota. 2011.

Michael Hettich's poems emanate a humbled familiarity of the world through windows that provide a glimpse into intimate moments in the natural world. In his newest collection, *The Animals Beyond Us*, we undergo an exploration of silence through clean, rhythmic lines. The poems resonate through a deeper, more primal understanding—the way silence moves things and how it is earned. While Hettich's poems "leap and fall away" like a simple breath, they stay with

you, resonating like a rediscovered memory of a childhood home or the eerie awareness of a spirit in the dark.

The first section, "The Honey Bees," opens with the poem, "Window," where different forms of silence are supposed:

If silence were a creature like a dog, and could follow you  
around like a dog does, and come when you called.  
If silence were a housecat you rescued in the alley,  
pampered and de-clawed, who sat around ignoring you  
and purred sometimes in her sleep.

These suppositions ask the reader to see silence not as nothingness, but as its own creature with the ability to yield its own effects. Observing the world through a window provides clarity by diminishing the clutter of noise, igniting a keen understanding of natural interactions; "When it's cold you make fires in your hair and your clothes/ which you think of as ghosts or lovers./ When it's cold you understand things by leaving them alone...you look out at the birds,/ winter birds gorging themselves on your suet/ while you sit burning inside."

We are asked to learn from these creatures—observing the way things are by themselves. In the second section, "Even Sleeping," the poem, "The Wild Animal," articulates the beauty of this type of understanding:

I lived inside the hope of rain, she says. I lived inside  
the gesture of a fisherman casting out his line.  
The bait was still alive and swam frantically and bled  
as the tide reached its arms out and gathered up seaweed  
filled with tiny creatures and stories of the depth of things  
where you and the other world, the one without end  
without end became mesmerized, covered in a pelt of fur  
no one had a name for

Hettich's collection demonstrates a deep love for the world, evident in the eloquence of his language—for every layer of being.

Beyond the natural world, the poems delve into human idiosyncrasies; "... these cats of the mind, small rituals/ we live by." demonstrating a subtle clash between the untamed and domesticated selves, like wild ideas briefly entertained, and then suppressed; "so we pet them as we shoo them, as we go in and out, / until they start to purr, and a second silence/ rises from their bodies into ours."

Through silence and observation, we learn that lines are blurred between humans and other living beings. We are all here weathering the storm together, layer upon layer. "I jumped into a mountain stream/ so cold it ran through my body like another life/ and proved something that way, about silence. And letting go." Once we let go by embracing silence, fear is eradicated from the soul, enabling us to see and feel without distraction.

The third section, "Concrete and Mortar," captures a disintegration of life, juxtaposing the grotesque and the ordinary. In the poem, "The Seamless World," life and death are captured in the same body:

Driving home, late, I saw  
a black snake in the road, the back of its long body  
flattened into the street by a car,  
its front still trying to slither away  
as though nothing had happened, as though it thought  
It might start moving any moment now...

Logic is suspended even in observing this natural event, as it is transcended by the will to keep moving. Perhaps we are more lost in trying to impose logic on the world rather than simply accepting ambiguities of instincts and thoughts. *"Everyone, I thought, is confused about the world, though some—like insects and birds—rarely show it."*

"House of Light," the final section of the collection, asks for understanding and acceptance of circumstance. Like small birds, "they ask us to understand our grief/ by simply leaping out, trusting the air..." Hettich's collection instills hope in the heart and sings a love for all things—tragedies and natural beauty alike. While his lines are simple, the poems carry enormous weight by weaving stories from moments and interacting with each other. They remind us that everything is converging, fleeting, and becoming something else:

so they [the winds] decided to seem human for a while,  
until they could blow things apart from within;  
they started to move like nothing with a vengeance,  
driving cars and building houses. *On, and on, and on.*

—Kristina DiPano

## **The Glass Crib**

AMANDA AUCHTER, ZONE 3 PRESS: CLARKSVILLE, TENNESSEE. 2011.

In her debut collection, *The Glass Crib*, Amanda Auchter accompanies her readers along a heart-wrenching passage from the possibility of new life, the loss of family, to the acceptance and relinquishment of pain. With a melodic quality and mysticism infused throughout, she pulls the reader forward and creates a hymn-like feeling in the final section. Auchter incorporates clearly religious themes, but the collection is accessible to everyone and reads as a path to transcending disappointments and becoming whole.

The title image sets the tone for the fragility of this journey—a crib made of glass being at once transparent and weak, but still a cage. This image is seen first in "The Threat" as the mother leaves the child. "I am speaking / for the child in me inside the glass crib, eyes / turned toward the mother who pushed / through the door with nothing but her / coat and handbag." It is repeated in "Offer It Up" which reads with the repetition and rhythm of a prayer, "For the mother / who gave me life, then left with her / purse and car keys / while I palmed the glass crib." These scenes illustrate the idea of the title image, of a child experiencing everything and not being able to control or affect any of it.

Auchter starts us off with the hopes of a new life, a child, in the first poem of this collection, “The Annunciation.”

I dreamt this  
was an open invitation scrawled in  
  
the air, the moon’s yellow light. Sometime  
in the future I might undress and find  
the small voice inside mine. My skin  
  
stretched and torn into the shape  
of a child’s arm or a foot, and then  
  
a mouth, an eye. His incredible blue  
breath.

Here is the announcement of possibility, of expectation, and promise. The spiritual aspect of Auchter’s work first appears with this title’s religious definition. The Annunciation was when the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary she would conceive and be the mother of Jesus.

The poems in the first section, “Possible Beginning,” take the reader through a slideshow of painful situations from unplanned children, to miscarriages, and the pregnancy of an unwed woman. Although painful to read at times, when written from the child’s perspective the voice seems almost forgiving, like these lines from “The Half Brother”—“In the first version of our mother’s life, / what might I best have been / had she kept me—the drowning stones in her / pocket, the anchor, the brick?” There is an acknowledgement here, an acceptance, of the decision that was made.

The second section, “Without,” immerses the reader in a world of loss. Death fills the stanzas, but a lyrical movement to the lines keeps them alive. “Pyx,” which is a container for carrying the Eucharist to the sick, tells the story of a dying son and here, again, we see the strong religious theme that emanates throughout this collection. Auchter lays this scene out for readers with bold line breaks and fluidity to the words.

The gilded pouch, flat like a watch,  
the sachet of God. My mother  
  
removes the traveling Host,  
  
this lamb-stamped, circle-  
cut corporal. Christ &  
  
his bleached bones, floured,  
unrisen. Touched with palm-  
  
sweat, the dying’s slow pulse.

The journey comes to an end with the acceptance and relinquishment of pain in the last set of poems, “Bring Slendor.” This section starts with “Eden” and follows a trail of betrayal and forgiveness. Auchter calls upon female Saints to get to a feeling of euphoria in the words of the last few poems of this collection. The reader is brought to the beginning lines of the final poem in which there is an absolution from it all. “Made of dirt and pulse, the body’s flare. The flesh / that forgives thorn, whip, the striking / hand. Made of eyelash, sun, the whole / of the body transfigured—”.

--Jenn Bronson

## **Traction**

Mary Makofske. Winner of the 2010 Richard Snyder Poetry Prize. The Ashland Poetry Press: Ashland, OH. 2011.

Quietly assured in its presentation, *Traction* gently pulls its reader across the landscape of a delicate history, colored with nods to both the progressions and declinations of society. Titular friction is evident in the underlying cut of each poem. One might not find a seemingly unassuming collection of poetry to have such aggression, yet Mary Makofske’s *Traction* shows such strength and intensity, with an impressive range.

Makofske provides a certain tranquility, which proves the most effective approach, as it journeys to the first poem in the collection: “In an Unnamed Country”. The poem illustrates, quite simply, a fallen symbol of beauty: a yellow tulip. This tulip is lost in a ravaged urban street, far from its own habitat. Yet, the flower remains unscathed by others who find no reason for its purity:

The few who slink beside the buildings  
will not stoop to lift it. A tulip  
can’t be eaten, can’t be fired

The yellowed beauty of the tulip serves no purpose to those who feel there is no practical use. But this is the daring question that Makofske asks of us: do we feel as if only things can be enjoyed through consumption or warfare? Is it possible to exist in beauty and contentment without purpose or reason?

The poet is smart and subtle, raising questions of our humanity and history throughout *Traction*. Stylistically, her work feels nude in the sense that it is raw, personal, and unadorned. Language is simple, though not colloquial. She selects words carefully, not arbitrarily, which allows for greater appreciation of the simplicity of her poetry when it has reached its last line. Her own foibles, coupled with the genuine textures of her written voice, keep the poems alive.

Honesty and a willingness to be vulnerable are what make this poet, and her work, captivating. One such poem which recognizes due change and progression is “L’Enfants Avenues”, which depicts the dramatic and dynamic Washington D.C. area in the 1960s. It uses the image of lively young girls at the crest of youth, and their realization of how “the roads were

designed to yawn". Upon reaching this understanding of necessary change, the confession of having fallen into the rut of expectation at the end of the poem strikes as powerful: "We had been/circling all our lives".

Masterfully, the poet has the ability to unearth subjects both familiar and alien, as well as an ability to sew threads of archetypal history into the fabric of society. The poem, "White Gloves" serves as a metaphor for breaking away from societal teachings. The mother passes on the white gloves to the girl which temporarily assuages her discomfort but which cannot keep her from later "fevers, the itch/of desire". We are left with an image of the mother holding the white gloves, representative of cultural expectation, with a careless ease, as if to suggest a woman's grace could deliberately avoid the constrictions of gender roles:

before me, but I saw  
her wearing her flesh  
with ease-

the curves of her feet  
barely contained  
in her summer sandals.

*Traction* channels the reader into a dynamic atmosphere shrouded in history and tokens of memory. Makofske's voice is both confident and inviting as it quietly beckons us to join her in moments of introspection. Her delicate storytelling and understanding of human folly and habit present a varied collection of evocative poems that hearken back to a more traditional era.

--Noelle Kennady

## **Push**

Ronald F. Smits. University of Scranton: Scranton, Pennsylvania. 2009.

Ronald F. Smits transports his reader to small town America, where simplicity, like his writing, is bliss. His poems primarily focus on the average middle-class life that is filled with mundane tasks like hanging laundry and playing catch, but where the people are happy to be in his poems. It is refreshing to meet a poet who writes his lyrics because he is content with his life, and not because he is overwhelmed by it. In the poem "Who Needs Ft. Apache?" Smits describes the unbridled imagination of childhood with such great detail that it feels as if his Indians are real and attacking his cowboys, "My Indians snapped into their plastic / saddles on their plastic horses / and galloped against Ft. Apache" (Smits 7).

Smits later confesses that Ft. Apache was his Christmas and birthday present combined. He later transitions from childhood innocence to adulthood, but still with the positive outlook of his youth. He describes his paintings with such enthusiasm that the reader wants to pick up a paint brush and begin painting a story, just like Smits, "With bare hands, / we scoop out buckets, / apply it to our canvas, / hands as acrylic as the river, / canvas as panoramic as the sky" (Smits 18).

Not all of Smits's poems are as happy, although most are uplifting. In "A Map for my Mother," he describes how his mother is comforted after his father's death, knowing that he is buried under a sycamore tree, his father's favorite, and a representation of how his memory will live on after death: "Father of all hardwoods, / the first one to grow on earth, / stands over my father ... Now my mother knows the way / map in hand, sycamore in her heart" (Smits 36).

Smits's poems always end with something refreshing, or at least encouraging, so the reader always feels subconsciously relieved at the end of a poem. He has a gift in turning nature into magic, always appreciating the earth for her wonders and taking a second to really ponder them. In "The Whale Rocks," he contemplates how the rocks arrived at the beach, and where they came from. Besides, their intrepid journey needs to be recognized as spectacular: "Did the Ice Age glaciers push them / from some northern plain / to leave them on this moraine?" (Smits 44).

It is his keen attention to detail that allows his works to be spectacular. It is as if he still peers at the world through wide eyes like a child and wants to tell the reader the simple story of it.

*--Kristy McDaniel*

**Black Lantern Publishing: A Macabre Journal of Literature and Art**  
Volume II. Issue No. 5. November 2011.

Even a glance at the cover of the latest issue from Black Lantern Publishing leaves no doubt about its creepy contents. A winking woman with boney hands and pointed ears poses in front of a trio of leering ghouls. You've got to know it's going to be scary reading!

The journal is filled with haunting stories, intriguingly macabre poems and illustrations worthy of the dark arts. It offers a fun read for anyone, who enjoys delving into the fantastic.

The story "Final Attempts at Relief and Cure" by Jo Neace Krause is written in the form of a letter to a former teacher. It draws a character study of a weird woman, who describes growing up as "like recovering from a mental disease in which you finally become sane." When she was about six or seven, the character says, "I could...write songs about the Little Baby Jesus. Then something happened... My mind began to stir like a puddle of mud, round and round.... It had to do with the baby Jesus, all the ceremony and worship and stuff that surrounded the Jesus thing.... I began to worry; worry all the time."

Krause takes us into the girl's rambling thoughts about where that baby came from and whether this could happen to her. And then, when the character follows two school mates to the home of a black doctor who performs abortions and treats unwed mothers, the reader is presented with a scene of macabre humor:

I straddled this broad slick banister and rode backwards down and down. Just as I crumbled to the rug at the bottom, a door opened down the hallway, and a tall muscular man—a light skinned Negro—came out... covered all over in a gore of red blood, holding his rubber gloved hands in the air... His eyes fell on me with absolute dismay.

While the story is hard to follow at times, it does portray the confused mind of the deranged letter writer. The author ends her character-driven tale with the woman promising to visit the teacher, now that she only lives a few blocks away from him. The poor professor must be shaking in his boots!

Then there's "The Pickled Man." The author, Aaron Milstead, introduces us to an old carnival fellow, Wilbur Will, who keeps a little monster in a bottle. The story ends as he tells his skeptical customer: "Don't worry, he's climbing up your body and soon he'll be up at your face and you can look at him real close. He likes to start at the face and eat his way down..." This one could give you nightmares or maybe just indigestion!

One of the poems that I enjoyed in this issue is "Winged Words" by Roman Belo:

She speaks in birds,  
macaws in strokes of  
matted acrylics spin  
out of her lips like a  
flamenco skirt  
spins  
just before the stamp of the  
hard heel—

Accompanying artwork by Walker M. Huggins provides a surreal interpretation. The dancer swirls, her arms twisting above her Spanish orange and powder-blue skirt, while two parrots spread their wings against the rippling hem. "Winged Words" received a Pushcart Prize Nomination for 2011.

In "The Wizard is Away" Erika Brumett writes about death on Halloween. The poem paints vivid images that evoke the scene of a wake with costumed children knocking at the door:

At the front door, a four year-old Dorothy,  
Toto, and papa in tow. To the dead, behind the curtain, pay no attention.  
For Baby Ruth bars, she gives ruby clicks,  
heel-taps to trick time, to treat all of Oz.  
"He's gone." I tell her. "There's no place like home."

Artwork by Barbara Konczarek, R.I. Provorse, and others adds spice to the grisly tales and glimpses into the disordered minds that they describe. It's a journal that would appeal to young readers as well as adults who enjoy the horror genre.

*--Margaret Howard Trammell*

## **Curses and Wishes**

Carl Adamshick. Louisiana State UP: Baton Rouge. 2011.

This world is often turbulent, with society and technology rapidly changing at a frightening pace. Carl Adamshick's *Curses and Wishes* certainly won the Walt Whitman Award for his technique in portraying this turbulence with his quick, dashing sentences that frequently resemble something like strobe lights; after one flash there is a completely different scene. However, his scenes often do not look like they were even in the same building, let alone the same room. In his poem "Nursing" the poet states, "It has become clear / the woman in the warehouse / is being beaten. // I think of Illinois, / and its endless horizon" (Adamshick 13).

Despite the fact that some poems are very difficult to follow, most of his poems are lovely and filled with the grotesqueness of life. In one series, he writes of death with such tumultuous detail that the reader cannot escape the terror that the victim felt. In "The book [sic] of Nelly Sachs," he describes how the earth mourns a life snatched from the innocent: "You may not know this, / but when you talk about the night / and its stars / you talk about her / sacrifice at the wall of the alphabets."

The wall of the alphabets, of course, are the horrors that the stars spell out of her death during The Holocaust. It is his intricate detail that helps to make the reader ponder the world its images. Adamshick often uses surprising line breaks, which give his words a range of multiple meanings. They force the reader to give his poems a second glance, and to reconsider each line. His strong sensory detail helps the reader to navigate through the many trials and tribulations of one's life. He uses acute sentences that parallel the harshness of synthetics with the gentleness of nature. His work often combines brutal logic with a blunt honesty: "I clear the chessboard of pieces / and find religion / is a word, that governments are words. / I find meaning / only when the letters are left undisturbed."

While many of his poems are thought provoking and even magical, not all of his lyrics are as eloquent. Some of subject matters are intangible and hard to follow, partly because of his choppy syntax: "We took your food and in a few days / you'll see we took your excrement. / We've devised such intricate rules." To this reader, while food will eventually turn into excrement, and Adamshick forces the reader to consider this, it really was not necessary, and even risked detracting from the poem's overall effect. Sometimes the impression left after reading some of the more abstract works from the collection is that the writer is simply trying too hard to be clever.

--Kristy McDaniel