her mind during the most sacred church service. She shows her ambivalence toward the political system and ecopolitics. Williams poignantly shares her struggle to accept her mother's cancer and her own frightening medical diagnosis.

Through her own fifty-four variations on voice, Williams transforms her mother's silence into a cacophony of birdsong: a call for women to raise their voices as birds, declaring the change of seasons and celebrating new beginnings. The book occupies a feminine space but will be enjoyed by men and women alike for its depth and insight. Anyone interested in the landscape and culture of Utah, what it means to be a Utah woman, and environmental and cultural debates of the West will be urged to think about profound and difficult issues and yet derive pleasure and meaning from this unusual book.

***Subterranean Red.*** By Kathleen Johnson.
Norman, OK: Mongrel Empire Press, 2012. 61 pages, $14.00.

**Reviewed by Elizabeth Toombs**
University of Oklahoma

The poetry of Kathleen Johnson, a native Oklahoman of Cherokee and Scots-Irish ancestry, grasps onto snapshots of generational memory and rhythms of imagination to explore roots and home. Red earth, the central element of Johnson's second poetry collection, *Subterranean Red*, underscores the connection of identity with the color of creative passion, place, and people. Some selected poems and characteristics from Johnson's first poetry book, *Burn*, a 2009 Kansas Notable Book, continue to emit textual light in this collection.

At times, the characters in "Mixed Blood Messages," the first of two sections in *Subterranean Red*, struggle in balancing light as a generative force with the darkness of unknowing. Many poems in this section end in darkness where characters often "look to the shadows" (6). "In Wildwood Cemetery" illustrates a desire for knowledge from ancestors who literally have returned to the earth: "tonight we share / the same November moonlight, / but we're both still in the dark" (13). This section closes with a Cherokee legend, "Raven Mocker," an extreme expression of darkness where a witch and "harbinger of fear and final dark" steals away the heart of the dying to extend her own life (17).

Photographs often drive the narratives of these poems and serve as entryways to memory reinforced by language. Here, relationships to kin and land serve as sources of survival and strength. For example, "Cherokee Grandfather" adds dimension to the past that creatively informs the present and serves as a guide for the future. However, the most lasting and impressionable relationships are not captured visually. "Wild Sand Plums" recalls songs in the "old language" about faith and survival traced back to Cherokee homelands in Georgia and shared through four generations of women (9). These ancestral lives remind

us about the importance of one's relationship between physical and spiritual worlds.

Earth also looms in the second section, "Cimarron Breaks," named for an ecoregion in southwestern Kansas that extends into central Oklahoma. The breaks reference the broken ground where Johnson's great-great-grandfather, the poet known as the Pilgrim Bard, homesteaded. These breaks may also express the ruptures in Johnson's family, such as her father's alcoholism and infidelity, the destructive capacity of landscape noted in "Dust Bowl Diary, 1935" and "Tornado Warning," or the cultural scarring and subsequent development that resulted from the Cherokee Strip Land Run in 1893. Rather than dwelling on these conflicts, however, Johnson continually stresses the importance of language as a source of regeneration: "But because we have your words, the wonder holds. / Nothing, not even prairie cyclones, can whisk it all away" (26).

Through vivid imagery, heavy symbolism, and skillful form, Johnson offers an appreciation of issues related to mixed-blood identity that defies neat categorization. Even though *Subterranean Red* is anchored to earth, Johnson's impressions of the Oklahoma landscape through poetry reveal a sense of home that denies fossilization. She artfully engages in a homecoming of the imagination, a dynamic spiritual process that grows from a sense of connection.

***Custer.*** By Larry McMurtry.
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012. 177 pages, $35.00.

**Reviewed by Brian Dippie**
University of Victoria, BC

This is an unnecessary book. Larry McMurtry has done no original research, and he has nothing fresh to say. A master storyteller, he never gets hold of this one. The prose is conversational—assuming the conversationalist is an opinionated monologist—and reads like a first draft. Factual errors abound, undercutting any reason to take McMurtry's opinions seriously. A biographer who cannot even get his subject's age correct is not really trying. (A man born in December 1839, killed in battle on June 25, 1876, did not die at thirty-seven—nor, for that matter, was his wife, born in April 1842, widowed at thirty-five [5, 164].) Such elementary errors are symptomatic of a carelessness that goes directly to the issue of credibility, undermining the reader's confidence in the author's judgments. Fundamental issues are misrepresented. For example, Custer was court-martialed *before* the battle of the Washita, not after, making it impossible that his conduct of the battle caused many of his officer corps to testify against him at his court-martial, as McMurtry would have it (20).

Custer has been a charm for novelists who want to write a biography of a larger-than-life character—hero or villain, as you wish him—with a grand finale more compelling than imagination could conjure. His first