

one's suffering at the inadequacy of the means of description." This line not only contrasts the rest of the poem with its solemnity, but also with its length, affecting a formal as well as thematic balance.

The Zoo in Winter demonstrates Polina Barskova's intention to engage the world of literature while simultaneously invoking, creating, and sustaining a singular presence: "The main thing is to move like canal water—that is, not move." This line from "Birkenau" echoes the poet's desire to move fluidly across various canons while holding firm to her own poetic convictions. She writes with a tenderness for her mother country that extends through every facet of Russian art and culture; and she demands a diligent reader who is willing to delve into endnotes in order to unpack these dense poems. The real reward is witnessing her purity of balance—the ability to hold laughter and sadness, conversation and lyric, in the same palm—and then to transcend that union entirely.

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Joey Brown. **Oklahomaography.** Norman, Oklahoma. Mongrel Empire. 2010. iv + 66 pages. \$14. ISBN 978-0-9801684-6-4

The Oklahoma that Joey Brown depicts in her collection of quiet, earthy, lyrical poems is as much a depiction of collective consciousness as a concrete place. *Oklahomaography* constructs a sense of earth and passages that informs one's fundamental sense of "bodiness" about a place and time. The poems reveal the desire to create and maintain sets of connections—mainly to friends, family, and community—and to possess a set of roots that suggest a certain groundedness that perhaps never was, and never can be.

The Oklahoma of the collective identity is one that deconstructs itself through its peeling paint, Route 66 artifacts and memorabilia, collapsing barns, rusting hay balers, creaking pumping units, and bulging and rusted tanks next to old oil wells. The descriptions in Brown's poems evoke an ethos of a deeply faded reality, of earth-toned images,

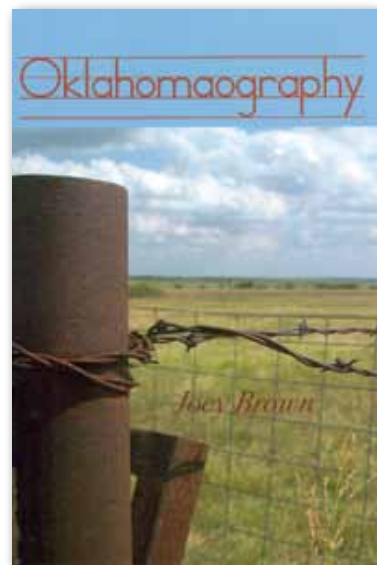
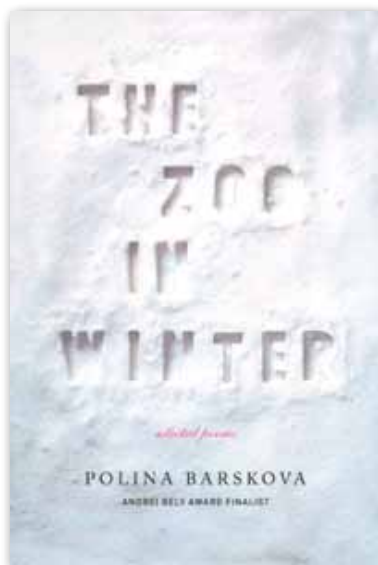
of living in what was once a boomtown based on oil, wheat, or other earth-generated sources of wealth. As a result, Brown's depiction of the rural Oklahoma of today is a ghost of the past; the original pioneers, oil barons, farmers, and oil operators have an intense presence that is, in some respects, a ghostly echo.

Section 1, "I Keep Saying Oklahoma," is a paean to a disappearing culture. In reality, it's a culture that dominated for only around fifty or sixty years—from the 1920s to the early 1980s—before a combined agricultural and oil bust resulted in rural depopulation. Brown's poems reflect the constantly shifting demographic landscape's impact on the people who stay.

Brown pays attention to the people in small towns in Oklahoma as well. The individuals are road maps of experience; Brown's geographies of self give them an identity informed by their interactions, even collisions, with the artifacts around them, such as in "The Given End," where the protagonists ride in a car that "wad-ded into a ball of barbed wire fence."

In sections 3 and 4, "Highways Some Place Else" and "July," the core motif is the road trip and travel as a way to trigger meaningful encounters—to generate revelatory moments that unveil the structures of one's own mind. While on the road trip, problematic connections surface, and it becomes rather evident that perceived reality is largely built on a nostalgic heroic narrative where survival itself is problematized by individual self-awareness—a kind of blues-inflected "yes, we are mortal" narrative that happens when one is coated with dust and maintains a connection with the earth.

Yet Brown's poems are not nihilistic, nor are they fatalistic. They are



energized by the insistence that one's connection to natural processes of erosion, decay, and deposition triggers a hyperawareness of what it means to be alive, and to live in the "now"—even while recognizing that the artifacts of the past are in certain ways determinants of current reality.

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Nikola Madzirov. **Remnants of Another Age.** Peggy Reid et al., tr. Carolyn Forché, intro. Rochester, New York: BOA. 2011. 103 pages. \$16. ISBN 978-1-934414-50-7

Remnants of Another Age is a bilingual Macedonian-English edition of selected poems by Nikola Madzirov (b. 1973), an internationally acclaimed poet of a younger generation. Madzirov represents yet another genuine lyrical voice of the Balkans, from the territory of the former Yugoslav republics. His poetics are founded on a specific type of nomadic wandering between variously opposed geographical, cultural, and spiritual territories that determine its characteristic existential position. Because of this, the poetic voice sees itself as a palimpsest comprised of several layers of memory, always reflected from an inner standpoint. The poem "Things We Want to Touch" begins with the line, "Nothing exists outside us."

Although Madzirov evokes the mythical and historical migrations, exiles, and wars that were waged in the Balkans, his poetry primarily reveals his private and personal mythology. This can be found in the long lines of his poems, highly resembling prose poems ("I don't know" and "Ruin Homes"). The lyrical mythology of this poet is formed around fragile, precise, and expres-

sive images that alternately emit light and darkness, shadow and dust. The landscapes of these images tend to be fantastic at times, almost mystical, with narrative elements that sharpen their symbolic potential.

Growing up homeless or between shelters, nostalgia always at hand, Madzirov shapes the former reality and saves it from oblivion by randomly writing down its visible yet hidden traces, and by naming things that nobody before him has seen or written down: "We forget / things even before we lose them - / the calligraphy notebook, for instance. / Nothing's ever new." Still, the principle of the repetitive cycle of life, remembrance, and death and the desire for love are always realized in a particular, specifically chosen moment. This moment, however, makes the poetic present transparent for both past and future, and for their mutual reflection in time that transcends the known world. As a result, a truly melancholic and elegiac atmosphere permeates these lines, despite occasional incantations, for it constantly reminds us of words that condense silence, which precedes and follows our lives.

The poet's vulnerability is thus equated with his mute testimony without witnesses: "My absence is a consequence / of all recounted histories and deliberate longings." And no matter how strong and painful this longing to go back to the original state of innocence and wholeness is, it might be the only thing that sustains the poet in and out of time. His transience can be measured by the intensity of spiritual and physical sufferings found in Madzirov's superbly modern religious imagination, as combined with the image of the body as a metaphysical entity:

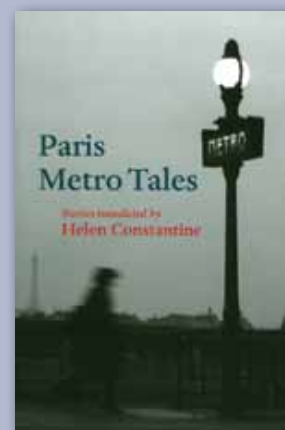
Nota Bene



Multicultural Comics

Frederick Luis Aldama, ed.
University of Texas Press

Can comic books teach us anything significant? Of course. This collection of accessible critical essays seeks to answer questions about unique cultural traditions and gender relations in the scope of both mainstream and independent comics from around the world.



Paris Metro Tales

Helen Constantine, ed.
Oxford University Press

This collection of short stories features work by both classic French writers and by modern newcomers, translated into English by Helen Constantine. These twenty-two tales—smartly evoking the twenty-two stops on the Parisian metro—provide a detailed snapshot of the beloved French city, each author and each story highlighting a different aspect of Paris.