

NOTES ON CURRENT BOOKS

As such, it is an extremely valuable anthology, which will be useful in university courses in both art and literature. Nowhere else can one find such an array of 20th-century manifestos translated from so many languages. The editor provides the reader with a thoughtful and stimulating introduction on what she calls the "poetics" of the manifesto. *Nebraska* \$35

Korea in the Cross Currents: A Century of Struggle and the Crisis of Reunification, by Robert J. Myers.

For half a century Robert J. Myers has been involved in Korean Affairs, first with the O.S.S. and in the 50's and 60's with the CIA, rising to deputy division chief for Asia. Continuing as president of the Carnegie Council on Ethics in New York, he travelled twice annually to Korea and neighboring countries with Asian values as his focus. In love with Korea, he writes as a political realist placing Korea in perspective surrounded by powerful neighbors who in earlier centuries occupied the country. He shows that viewing Korea as Asia's economic miracle or as at the center of world politics is misleading. While its long struggle for reunification and independence are praiseworthy, the results are unfinished. Its more populous South is democratic. The North suffers tyranny and famine. The book is part of a trilogy. It was preceded by *U.S. Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: The Relevance of Realism* and will likely be followed by a book on China. Myers' writing reminds us how much we missed when his heavy responsibilities as co-founder of *The Washingtonian* and publisher of *The New Republic* preempted time from longer publications. Today Myers is a major figure among the 21st century's political realists. *The Relevance of Realism* counsels Americans to readjust their thinking. Koreans are reminded they are a divided country whose politics and economics are inseparably joined. He views their situation respectfully with restraint but with undisguised hope for the future. Required reading for Asians and Americans.

Palgrave N.P.

POETRY

Errors in the Script, by Greg Williamson.

Williamson, whose first book of poems, *The Silent Partner*, won the 1995 Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, again proves himself a devoted student of language ("Yes, the body is made of water. That's / A fact. . . . / The body runs hot and cold and down"). Combining rigorous intelligence with an infectious sense of fun (what reader could resist a poem titled "The Life and Times of Wile E. Coyote, Super Genius"?), his second book is obsessed with double vision. For the literal, optical variety, see "Binocular Diplopia" ("This would explain a lot. In stereoscopic / Hindsight he reviewed old patterns of / Mistakes"); for the sort suggested by reflective surfaces, see the wonderful monologue by a "Three-Sided, One-Way Mirror." After all, double vision is the underlying condition of poetry—the habit of looking at things in two (or more) ways at once. The most dramatic example here is the long sequence "Double Exposures," which takes the photographic superimposition of images as both subject and form. Each poem in the sequence ("Girl Hugging Snowman with Broken Goddamn Radiator," for example) consists of two six-line stanzas printed (one flush left and the other flush right) so that they overlap in the middle of the page; each stanza can be read separately, *and* the whole set of alternating lines can *also* be read straight through. Some of the poems succeed better at this high-wire act than others, but in many cases the technique has striking results, and the sequence is decidedly a tour de force. *Overlook* \$23.95

Laugh at the End of the World: Collected Comic Poems 1969–1999, by Bill Knott.

No collection of American poetry is complete without the poems from Bill Knott's first book. Published in 1968 under the pseudonym Saint Geraud (1940–1966), *The Naomi Poems: Corpse and Beans* still shines with brilliance today. Since this book—and the other strong early collections—are long out of print, *Laugh at the World* is the best way to obtain these breathtaking poems. One does not quickly forget a poem such as "Minor Poem," which reads: "The only re-

NOTES ON CURRENT BOOKS

sponse / to a child's grave is / to lie down before it and play dead." Or "Death," which reads: "Going to sleep, I cross my hands on my chest. / They will place my hands like this. / It will look as though I am flying into myself." This is not to say that Knott's more recent poems are not worth reading—they are—but they do not cut with the same deftness of these short poems that Paul Carroll aptly labeled "lucid and electrifying." Buy the book for these and the other poems are gravy. *BOA Editions* \$15

Poems 1968–1998, by Paul Muldoon.

This book collects each of Muldoon's previous eight volumes of poetry in their entirety. There is no new work here, or even stray or occasional pieces added. That said, the book's fascination lies in the sheer variety of work that has been produced under Muldoon's signature. It shows not so much the development as his diversity of interest and style. The pieces range from the stoic to the comic, from high to low, from formally rigorous to free, and from apolitical to political. This is a worthwhile book for those looking to chronicle Muldoon's pantheon of work, but is probably too much or too diverse for the average reader—all the Muldoon's are here, but not everyone will like *all* of them. Still, the sweep is breathtaking.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux \$35

Cathedral of the North: Poems, by Connie Voisine.

In her first book, set primarily in a logging and factory town in the extreme north of Maine, Voisine reveals the intricacy of honoring and absolving a childhood of poverty. Central to *Cathedral* is the relationship with a father broken by a life of labor. His struggles to support his family are most pointedly examined in the long poem, "What Was So Beautiful About the Father," wherein his daughter declares: "One thing I did understand was how hard a father worked, how little it amounted to, and how forgiving I had to be because of it." Voisine expertly depicts details of northern life and landscape, and she falters briefly when she abandons Maine for other settings. Aside from those lapses, and a few

admissions of self-pity, *Cathedral of the North* succeeds in examining and accepting, with delicate attention, the knot of inherited love and anguish it claims as its own.

Pittsburgh \$12.95

A Crash of Rhinos, by Paisley Rekdal.

Reading Paisley Rekdal's stunning first collection of poems is like "being devoured/by geometry"—a sharp, deliberate, and beautiful assault upon the senses. The intelligently vivid reflections on radio talk-shows, past lovers, multicultural relationships, and the history of the tattoo are unapologetically irreverent. She confronts the personal as well as the historical, the realm of the family as well as the realm of pop culture and social consciousness, seamlessly uniting temporal and narrative fragments. The book is divided into four sections but the themes of love, cultural identity, and communication remain continuous throughout. Though her shorter poems tend to be sharper and more intimate than her longer meditations, she succeeds overall in not breaking the edgy spell that she casts from the first in the title poem. Endowing her love of words with a passion both dangerous and intellectual, Rekdal seduces us with her language, leading us into the dynamic heart of each poem. Rich with complexity of issue and language, *A Crash of Rhinos* unfolds like a dialogue, a bold secret between poet and reader. It is a breathtaking debut.

Georgia \$15.95

Quarters, by James Harms.

In James Harms' third collection of poetry this commonplace coin is a vehicle which takes the reader through a series of varied universes: a homeless woman makes a wish, a divorced father kills time at a bus station by watching a coin-operated television: "And he was an honorary angel as long as he stayed / put in Union Station, which by the look of things / (thirteen quarters and a few dimes) would be / an hour or so, a cop show or two sitcoms, four cigarettes and another coke." Everyday scenes are transformed into the magical and sometimes brutal by Harms' careful eye. In "Choose," a couple contemplates abor-