

Virginia Reviews



Stuart, Dabney. *Tables: Poems*. Montrose, CO: Pinyon Publishing, 2009. 85 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0982156117. \$15.00 (softcover).

Tables, Dabney Stuart's masterful fifteenth book of poems, begins with an intensity that is maintained throughout the work. "Gifts," the first poem, is a gem of control and originality, beautifully ornamented with a rhyme scheme using, save the fourth stanza, only two end sounds. Constraints like this, not to mention the regular meter, usually require poets to twist sentences and add unnecessary words, but Stuart's syntax is clear and straightforward here and in all the poems, even if it is not always simple. The skill to create this apparently inevitable flow of language is a part of mastery that does not come to poets easily or early in their careers. Think Frost, since he is mentioned later in the book, but a Frost who is as comfortable writing about subatomic particles and astrophysics as about stone walls. "Gifts," which suggests Stuart's early, formalist poetry, also introduces the book's central theme, the consideration of a life given to art—the mixed blessing of talent. It introduces artists including Joan Miro and Paul Klee, who will turn up again and again at crucial junctures in the flow of the book.

Tables is a notable example of how a book of poems differs from a collection. It has a definite progression, with each individual poem having something to add to the poet's themes and using recurring images that echo like footsteps in a long, empty hall. Hints of the formalism of "Gifts" show up along

the way, but often as unexpected rhyme or meter, looking effortless or accidental, though it is neither. Look, for instance, at the intricate rhyme scheme in "Joints," which I readily admit was pointed out to me by a more astute reader. It is *abcdeedcba*, with the fifth and sixth lines ending in the same word. Speaking of echoes, "Refrain" is an even more artful use of extremely constrained form appearing to be

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simple, natural speech. The intricate rhyme scheme of the first and third sections is impressive enough, but after a number of readings I realized that the shorter lines of section three end in the same word as their counterparts in section one. (Section two, so help me, looks like a sonnet.) So, while the book may appear to move toward freedom of language and form as it moves from an individual voice considering an individual life to that voice accepting both mortality and the physical fate of the universe as predicted by astronomers, the use of form runs through the poems like a spine. Decades ago a J. D. McClatchy review severely criticized one of Stuart's books for

having a section that was "merely a set of miscellaneous poems." Whether or not that was true of *Round and Round*, it has no relevance to *Tables*, forty-nine poems cut and set so precisely that no mortar is necessary.

Much of the poetry I read these days looks at life through a loupe, hoping to find a resonant image in the mundane. That is not necessarily bad, but I admire Stuart for having the nerve to use poetry to address the human condition in a larger context. That does not mean that the book is short on memorable phrases and images, such as the Merwinesque "as a farewell leaves its speaking / in its own name" from "Air Time," or this remarkable passage at the end of "Traveling Light":

If such light made a sound
it would be as if the wide space-
wind
formed a bell of itself,
and a smaller wind within, and
rang.

The poems in *Tables* move across the reaches of the mind, touching the development and tragedy of the atomic bomb, the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century painters, the monastic life, literal and figurative trips to the desert (complete with a hawk whose appearances suggest inspiration, vision, and desire, among other things), the inescapability of the family, and internal voices who have their own personalities: a prophet, a warrior, a courtier poet. Stuart considers, in "The Expanding Universe,"

—the mind's great whirl, its
curvilinear
shiftings, the spherical web it
throws out

into its shapeless dark, a
comfort
and a confusion, vaster than its
own
intentions, its need.

The vastness of the book's theme does not preclude humor, and there is quite a bit scattered through, usually coming as a welcome surprise, appearing effortless and accidental like the formal elements. In *Trials*, for instance, Stuart takes a swipe at Sidney, who appears in a number of the poems as one of the narrator's interior voices:

I have tried looking in my heart
to write this,
according to instructions, but
hypertension
and elevated cholesterol have
muddled the source.

In spite of this self-deprecation, the book is one of the best examples of current poetry that really does come from a poet looking directly at himself and his situation. Consider "Transitions," which confronts both the struggle with the artist's overwhelming need to create and the fear that at some point that need will disappear. "Mummery" continues this confrontation:

What could be more indifferent
than this pen,
warmed by my fingers, when I
put it down?

Some poets burn out early, some reach a level of skill they never improve upon, but a few grow and learn and refine their gifts over the course of long and productive lives. *Tables* is worth reading as a celebration of a poet of the long haul. There is much to delight and much to instruct the attentive reader. The book may be purchased through Amazon.com or directly from Pinyon Publishing (www.pinyon-publishing.com).

—Cy Dillon



Mack, Angela D., and Stephen G. Hoffius, eds. *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. xvi + 166 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-57003-719-1. \$24.95 (hardcover).

Southern art remains one of the more dimly lit regions of America's historical terrain—in part, perhaps, because perceptions of its legacy continually change. As a result, the body of scholarship concerned with the art of the South is

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still brief enough that any addition to its ranks merits attention. When such a publication offers an original contribution to the field, as does *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art*, there is even greater reason to take notice.

Produced in conjunction with a 2008 travelling exhibition of the same name, *Landscape of Slavery* surveys more than three hundred years of imagery devoted to the plantation. Over the course of six essays, its authors bring new interpretations to bear on familiar works, introduce readers to fascinating lesser-known artists and images, and forge new relationships between the art of the past and present.

It might come as a surprise that the plantation was a contested, contradictory icon from the very beginning. Although

most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artists leaned heavily on existing English pictorial traditions to depict the Southern landscape, contemporary debates about the nature of slavery—the cornerstone of the plantation economy—often produced profound variations in the representation of the plantation itself. As contributor Roberta Sokolitz notes, the publication of mid-century anti-slavery texts like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) coincided with a similar shift in the artistic treatment of the plantation and its black and white inhabitants. Artists as socially diverse as the African-American painter Robert Scott Duncanson (1821–1872) and the itinerant John Atronbus (1831–1907) painted picturesque works that shared similar artistic ambitions, but they differed dramatically in the value they placed upon the plantation as a cultural institution.

Even at their most radical, few artists offered penetrating views into lives of the slaves who worked the plantation. *Landscape of Slavery* thoughtfully explores this omission. Leslie King-Hammond provides a wide-ranging account of the continuation of African art-making within the space of the plantation. Her essay reveals another of the catalogue's highlights: numerous illustrations from nearly every medium. One finds eighteenth-century drawings of Virginia plantations juxtaposed with photographs of African-American workers taken nearly one hundred and fifty years later. These are accompanied by fascinating images of the decorated interiors of slave cabins, photographs of ornately carved grave markers, and reproductions of African-American arts and crafts. Such objects and images carved a space within and beyond the dominant plantation aesthetic.

As later essays make clear, the

plantation has lost little of its power to fascinate. Like the work of contemporary artists such as Kara Walker and Bailey Radcliffe, *Landscape of Slavery* challenges, often poetically, many of the received notions about the diverse roles the plantation played as a social and political symbol. Individually and in aggregate, these essays offer the beginnings of a frank reassessment of the legacy and relevance of Southern art.

—Patrick Tomlin, *art + architecture librarian, Virginia Tech*



Simmons, Clara Ann. *Chesapeake Ferries: A Waterborne Tradition, 1636–2000*. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2009. viii + 128 pp. ISBN-10: 0-938420-78-X. \$34.00 (softcover).

From the explorations of Captain John Smith to the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, author Clara Ann Simmons takes the reader on a journey by ferry on the Chesapeake Bay spanning almost 400 years. Accompanied by rich illustrations, including photographs, maps, and paintings, the journey begins in 1607 with Captain John Smith's travels of the bay and its tributary rivers. These early explorations eventually led to settlements along the bay. In the 1630s, needing a quicker way to navigate the area than by foot, settlers began to use flat-bottomed scows to transport people and horses along the Eastern Shore in Virginia. Public ferrying, recognized by the courts, also began in this decade in Accomack and Princess Anne Counties in Virginia. Ferry travel became commonplace throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as industry increased, roads improved, and the population increased.

Simmons also includes accounts of how ferries touched the lives of important American historical

figures, including the family of George Mason. The Mason family owned and operated a ferry along the Occoquan Creek as well as the Potomac River. The ferry business proved to be a profitable one for the family. There are also several accounts of George Washington's ferry travels, including during the Revolutionary War and during his presidency.

An interesting overview of tavern life that developed around ferry ports is woven throughout many of the eight chapters. Tav-

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erns popped up around popular routes and had varying levels of comfort to ferry-goers. While some reveled in the often festive atmosphere, many travelers objected to tavern life. Several diary accounts are included.

The final chapter is an accounting of railroad and automobile ferries. In 1838, a merger between Philadelphia, Wilmington and New Castle Railroad and Frenchtown and New Castle Railroad Company brought combined ferry and railroad travel across the bay. The ferries were used throughout the nineteenth century, including during the Civil War. Pennsylvania Railroad and Virginia Ferry Corporation provided automobile and passenger ferry service from Norfolk to Cape Charles from the 1930s until the 1950s. The Virginia Ferry Corporation was taken over by the Commonwealth of Virginia, which eventually resulted in the

planning and construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Eventually the ferry business gave way to the popularity and convenience of the automobile; however, a small number of ferry routes still exist today in Maryland and Virginia.

Chesapeake Ferries would be an excellent addition to a public, academic, or special library that collects material on transportation or Virginia and Maryland histories. With such an interesting mix of social, political, and military history, the reader will get a fascinating account of how the Chesapeake Bay shaped the lives of Virginians and Marylanders and how they navigated those waters by ferry travel for nearly four hundred years.

—Janna Mattson, *social sciences liaison librarian, Mercer Library, George Mason University*



LeMone, Charles Shea. *Corner Pride*. Jerome, AZ: MultiCultural Educational Publishing Company, 2009. 181 pp. ISBN: 0-9703721-8-3. \$15.00 (softcover).

There is no lack of gritty, bare-knuckle books available about growing up in poor, rough neighborhoods. And often that grittiness will turn off potential readers—or, more to the point, give the impression that the story is completely devoid of hope from the very beginning. But LeMone's autobiographical novel offers a different perspective: focusing on hope rather than misery, and highlighting the characters' strengths against racism from without and oppression from within. We gradually see exactly what they're fighting against, but the narrative centers on the tenacity of youth seeking escape from the traps of poverty and gangs—and the fact that you can hate and love your neighborhood simultaneously.

James "Curly" Wylie is twelve

years old in 1957, and his neighborhood is the corner of Gratz and Oxford in North Philadelphia. James discovers his love of books early and dreams of becoming a writer. He knows that conditions around him are growing steadily worse. But not only are reading and writing escapes from the darkness slowly closing in on him, he's certain that being an author will provide a physical escape to a better neighborhood.

Eighteen-year-old Barry "Bear" Brown is the neighborhood hero, the preternaturally skilled boxer who hopes his fists will be his ticket out—though first he has to deal with a slick operator of a manager. He is fully aware of just how bad things are and how much worse they can become, but prefers trying to beat back (sometimes literally) the worst around him rather than letting it grind him down.

Interwoven with James and Bear are their families, the young women they love—and those who would hold them down and keep them from bettering themselves.

Instead of gut-punching his readers from the beginning, LeMone slowly immerses them in his characters' world and its dangers until the mounting horrors loom directly overhead. Piece by piece, readers start seeing the first hints of shadows, like the white cops who trail James and Bear when they walk at night. Gradually, the plot twists build until it seems both the neighborhood and those outside it are conspiring to steal what the young men have accomplished in order to make them serve violent ends. Sadly, secrets can emerge to haunt the innocent, and the way one survived before may suddenly and viciously turn to destroy a life. As one character discovers, the path to safety may only come through questioning what one believed before.

LeMone's pacing is almost leisurely, like a stroll down a street—

but be careful to look over your shoulder. He portrays a consistent atmosphere of always being a little on edge and alert even while appearing relaxed. The neighborhood itself feels familiar, comfortable, and sinister, often all at once. LeMone covers that often-ignored middle ground between shying away from inner-city problems and bleeding all over the page with them. In the meantime, he breathes life into the residents of Gratz and Oxford, putting their humanity up front while avoiding

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stereotypes—and showing how they work hard to avoid being stereotyped themselves, not always successfully, but sympathetically. *Corner Pride* is also recommended to young adult readers, though parents should be warned that it contains some brief sexual references.

—Danny Adams, evening services
librarian assistant, Ferrum College



Mooney, Barbara Burlison. *Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008. ix + 366 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0813926735. \$65.00 (hardcover).

What role do buildings play in the construction of the self? What stories do houses tell about their owners even long after they have vacated the premises? These

are the questions Barbara Mooney poses in *Prodigy Houses of Virginia*. In answering them, she presents a compelling portrait of the desires, doubts, failures, and successes of the elite families of eighteenth-century Virginia.

The term "prodigy house" denotes a small group of large, luxurious houses built in the late colonial period. True to its name, the country manor has indelibly marked the country's landscape as have few architectural forms. Whether viewed as an elegant symbol of genteel Southern culture or as an ignominious product of the labor of poor white farmers and black slaves, the iconic status of this regional architecture makes it a particularly rich subject for those interested in learning how cultural values can be shaped through design. These otherwise silent structures were, and continue to be, fraught with protean and contradictory meanings about social status, family life, and domestic roles.

Mooney illuminates those meanings through careful examination of the men and women responsible for these monuments of early American architecture. Over the course of seven chapters, she draws upon a wealth of primary sources—including demographics, contracts and public documents, journals and correspondence, plans, and portraits—to better understand why Virginia's native elite first became architectural patrons. The colonial country house was an obvious testament to personal wealth, of course, but, as Mooney makes clear, its sheer physical presence also symbolized the growing entrenchment of a social order to which such grand architectural expressions might naturally belong. Her text traces the rise of such notable Virginians as John Carlyle and William Randolph III and the critical role their grand homes played in securing

and broadcasting their sweeping political and economic ambitions.

Mooney's account is most compelling, and most noteworthy, when it strays from traditional historical narratives. Her discussion of the ways in which marriage and the domestic partnerships between husbands and wives impacted the construction of elite architecture, for instance, complicates a model of architectural patronage embodied by more familiar colonial Virginians such as Thomas Jefferson and William Byrd II. Since women were unable to own property, female patrons were rare. Nevertheless, they left their mark on Virginia's built environment through dowries and dower rights and, in some cases, direct input into the design of the prodigy house. The penultimate chapter of *Prodigy Houses*, moreover, examines the creation of what the author labels "a female epistemology of space" within the mansion: through conceptual divisions of the brick-and-mortar architecture, the gendered rituals of domesticity were defined and enacted by the wife, informed and shaped by the very actual spaces of the house.

That such details are grounded in close formal readings of individual prodigy houses makes Mooney's text a significant contribution to the history of Virginia architecture and much more than a typical survey. Like their owners, the twenty-five houses analyzed here could be no more different from each other, yet each has grown more familiar, less distant, and more recognizable as a whole because of the author's illuminating intervention.

—Patrick Tomlin, art + architecture librarian, Virginia Tech



Peery, Janet. *What the Thunder Said*. New York: Picador, 2007. 306 pp. ISBN: 978-0-312-42793-1.

\$15.00 (trade paperback).

Janet Peery explores the stories behind the silences in an era and landscape that became synonymous with stoicism—the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. In a novella and short stories linked by characters and place, Peery proves she hasn't lost her deft touch during her own long silence following *The River Beyond the World*, her 1996 novel that became a finalist for the National Book Award. (*What the Thunder Said* won the Library of Virginia Literary Award for Fiction in 2008.) While several of

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these stories appeared in online and print journals to sweeten the wait between books, they appear now to even greater effect as part of the linked saga, along with a much-expanded version of "What the Thunder Said," whose shorter incarnation can be found in Peery's first collection, *Alligator Dance*, as well as in *The Best American Short Stories 1993*.

The primary actors in this drama are McHenry Spoon; his daughters, Maxine Jane (Mackie) and Mary Etta (Etta); and Audubon Jay Kipp (Audie), an orphaned Native American teen hired for his keep. Two love-triangles hold sway. The first is comprised of the two daughters and their father. Mackie does everything she can to please her father, but he clearly favors Etta, who ends up despising him and ultimately renouncing

all contact with him. The second triangle, which includes the two sisters and Audie, bears a similar nature: Mackie loves Audie, who loves Etta, who resents him but ends up marrying him, only to abandon him after a short time. Part of the suspense stems from the hope that Mackie will break the pattern somehow—that she might earn more than tolerance and an obligated affection from her father, or the weak friendship of proximity she gains with Audie. Failing that, one hopes she might find some purpose and independence, a contentment with life that relies on herself alone.

The Prologue, "Set Me as a Seal upon Thine Heart," originally appeared as a short story with the lyrical title "How Beautiful Thy Feet with Shoes" in VCU's Fall 2005 issue of *Blackbird* (http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v4n2/fiction/peery_j/shoes.htm), in slightly different guise. Mack Spain becomes McHenry Spoon, father of Mackie Spoon from "What the Thunder Said" (short story). The prose also experienced minor alterations, though plot, characters, and themes remain intact. In its remodeled form, the story now serves as the perfect introduction to the new volume, presenting several mysteries about the past and hinting at crucial aspects of the characters of both father and daughter, along with some insight into their strained relationship.

The novella that gives the book its title, "What the Thunder Said," which makes up Book One, appears in two parts. The first, "Fits and Starts," at eighty-three pages, is the longest stretch of linear narrative. This section, which carries us deeper into Mackie's world, reads so much like a novel that one hopes the rest of the book will follow suit. It is easy to get emotionally invested in the thoughtfully rendered details of Mackie's daily life, to feel swamped by the tragedy of

her mother's senseless death, and to experience Mackie's increasing distress over her relationships with her sister, father, and Audie. "Fits and Starts" builds up to such a point of tension that its resolution feels more like the end of a chapter, carrying the reader directly into part two, "Signs and Wonders," in quest of what happens next. However, "Signs and Wonders" jumps to another place entirely, in terms of both physical location and Mackie's emotional development, to the point where at times she does not seem like the same woman; and the short stories that follow deal with the main characters established in the prologue and Book One either incidentally, or at such a distance in time or viewpoint that they might belong to a separate book (which, in fact, they do). Part of this may have to do with the shifting viewpoints through which these characters are seen; and the cover's subtitle, "A Novella and Stories," reminds one that this is not a novel. As a collection of work that chronicles the lives of the Spoon family and those who encounter them, the book is a success, with each story lyrical and self-contained. Recurring connections permit a deeper level of access into these characters' lives in all their messiness and glory than would be possible in a group of unconnected stories.

"Signs and Wonders" expands upon the original short story, "What the Thunder Said," drawing heavily on a work that still stands up as one of Peery's best. As such, comparison is inevitable, as is a consideration of how well the older material fits into the larger structure of the new two-part novella. By the time this older material is introduced, Mackie's character has been developed more fully—and along different lines than one might expect from the short story. In interviews, Peery has explained that the process of expanding

from the story to create this book "took about ten years and four versions."¹

The problem with *What the Thunder Said* was that the voice was already there, and I didn't want to do violence against it. That voice in "What the Thunder Said" (the short story) was so urgent, and I could not sustain that kind of urgency for 150 pages, so I had to do some tinkering. [...] I did violence to it, really, by trying to stretch it out.²

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Further in that interview, Peery explains that she no longer feels this way—that after stretching the story to 350 manuscript pages, she pared it back to its present form, 150 printed pages. However, I still find myself troubled. To one who has read the original story many times, some of the changes made to fit the new, expanded storyline seem to weaken the impact of the original piece—while at the same time, the older material no longer matches what we've learned about Mackie. For example, compare these two passages, the first from the original story, the second from *What the Thunder Said*:

I came to feel a power over Missus, that I was strong and she was weak and this was only right. I took to slamming things—her teacup at

her place, a pair of scissors she had asked for—pretending accident, my slamming, and she would take it with a narrowing of eyes, but say just, "Lightly, Mackie, lightly."³

I came to feel a power over Missus, that never mind my twisted foot and that our sizes matched, I was strong and she was weak and this was only right. I took to slamming things, not hard, but with an edge—her teacup at her place, a pair of scissors she asked me to fetch—pretending accident, my slamming, and she would take this with a narrowing of eyes, but say just, "Lightly, Mackie-honey, lightly." One time when I was brushing out her hair—she wore it coiled at her nape and it had grown too long for her to tend alone—I pulled too hard, and she cried out (116).

The newly fleshed-out Mackie has previously displayed a helpful, self-sacrificing willingness to work and aid her family, along with a belief that hard work and kindness will someday inspire her family's love—a hope she retains despite all demonstrations to the contrary. Her partial lameness gives her sympathy for other people's pain. It feels out of character for her to suddenly conduct an affair with a married man while tending his invalid wife, let alone to treat that helpless woman with meanness and disrespect. No matter how hurt she's been by her sister, her father, and Audie, it's hard to believe that the young woman we've known would act this way, especially since this is meant to be her fresh start. Though the revised Mackie's actions have been somewhat softened (blunted) from the sharp edges of the arrogant original, and she does occasionally show signs of gentleness to the sick woman,

her basic attitude—transplanted from the short story—no longer fits. It's as though, along with the jump in time and place, the narrative of part two plunges back into the emotional landscape of the original Mackie Spoon, rather than continuing the story of the disappointed woman who compelled our interest in part one.

No matter how much we might wish that Peery had focused on Mackie's story all the way through, with the same wrenching immediacy and exquisite detail, this is a series of sometimes tenuously linked stories, with each individual component carrying its own flavor and weight. It's fascinating—if sometimes frustrating—to come at the threads of the narrative from oblique angles, encountering the characters who filled the prologue and Book One through different eyes—including both strangers and family members. Most of these stories are driven by their own concerns, well-realized and replete with detail; but they do deliver welcome news of distant friends. "No Liquor Sold to Indians Past Dark" provides insight into Jesse, the son of Mackie (now Maxine), showing us why he becomes the man he does. "Garden of the Gods," told from Etta's viewpoint as her life draws to a close, is surprisingly light and bittersweet, touching on all she's experienced in tantalizing glimpses. "Great Men and Famous Deeds" offers a stolen look at Audie Kipp. "How Oakies Look to Natives," the title piece of Book Two, allows us to see Etta's daughter Georgette as a grown woman who takes to the road to enjoy her last, painful days under her own power. This is a poignant portrait of a woman who stands up fiercely for her right to live the way she pleases. Georgette has an indomitable, cantankerous spirit and a unique, eccentric personality that in some ways epitomize what each of the sisters wished to accomplish.

"All of the House That Stood" and "Worldly Goods" show Maxine's chance at happiness, achieved almost too late.

Many of these stories were previously published. Though some seem to bear few if any changes, for others, like the prologue, though the prose is altered here and there, the most notable change between first publication and this book is the choice of names. It's true that writers often experiment with different names for their characters during the drafting process, and

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since Peery spent ten years writing this book, it's entirely possible that this is the primary reason for the changes. Further, to deconstruct the stories based on former drafts now frozen in time by publication is to miss the subtle glory of a broad vision that stretches across generations, with every detail of daily life vividly rendered. Nevertheless, the name changes do raise questions. Peery herself says,

I had written various stories, and once I had thinned out the novel I realized that those characters were probably important to the story. I saw that I'd been writing people from the novel on the side, unwittingly. So I did all the tinkering it took to make the whole conform to the accidental parts, and then I had a book.⁴

One perplexing example is

"Great Men and Famous Deeds," first published in *The Kenyon Review*, n.s., 27, no. 1 (Winter 2005), available online at <http://www.kenyonreview.com/~krsite/issues/winter05/peery.php>. In the original story, the hermit wasn't Audie Kipp, but Rado Pulsifer. His age is changed from "his middle forties" to "his middle thirties," but otherwise the description remains the same—which might account for why this hermit doesn't seem to conjure up much of the Audie we knew. However, the hermit is, after all, only incidental to this tale of two boys losing their innocence and discovering an unwanted connection with a person they've mocked, framed by the poignant story of an older man and his wife confronting his potential memory loss. And, for the most part, the characters central to Book One are still essential in Book Two, though their time onstage may be brief.

The question of style looms large in one's experience of this book. The language is absolutely beautiful, as dense and rich as poetry. The problem is, Mackie Spoon—and every other viewpoint—sounds at heart like the same accomplished writer, not only in cadence, but in the choice and phrasing of observations. This is, perhaps, less a flaw than an oddity, as the reader is rapidly drawn into Peery's musical cadence. The heavily nuanced prose can be a bit overwhelming at first, the lyrical diction seeming at times forced or stilted, as if Peery felt a poet's need to distill each sentence down to its most concentrated form and adopt the slightly artificial rhythm of blank verse. Even when ostensibly documenting a character's speech patterns in the first person, the prose falls into highly stylized sentences, such as "What would you expect, two men as unlike as Cap and Wheeler, Cap a born-again-and-loud-about-it stockman and Wheeler a state-your-business judge, the way they

shouldered up against each other all their lives, brothers as different and the same as, well, as sisters?" (27–28) or "Before you blinked, the two made up, and by and by they left, each to his peculiar progress" (28). However, when one spends any time with this book, the rhythm grows strangely compelling, the words precise but unexpected. Peery's intensely realized prose brings immediacy and beauty even to a stark and frightening landscape: "Wind and dirt a hundred miles across and two miles high, the noonday sky gone black as night, the sun, when you could see it, paler than a blister, the moon a glowing ember" (35). Her

style creates a texture that forces one to feel each singular, compelling detail—a unity that turns this collection into one whole, bringing cohesion to the fascinating universe of a family's many lives. With its quiet but insistent realism, its authenticity of emotion and place, this is a book that should appeal to readers of historical and literary fiction, and many a general reader besides.

Notes

1. Mary Flinn, "A Conversation with Janet Peery," *Blackbird* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2007), http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v6n2/features/peery_j/

transcript.htm (accessed September 9, 2009).

2. Mary Westbrook, "Following the Path: A Conversation with Janet Peery," *Fiction Writers Review* (June 26, 2009), <http://fictionwritersreview.com/interviews/following-the-path-a-conversation-with-janet-peery> (accessed September 9, 2009).

3. Janet Peery, "What the Thunder Said," *The Best American Short Stories 1993*, selected by Louise Erdrich with Katrina Kenison (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993), 163.

4. Westbrook.

—Lyn C. A. Gardner **VI**

Call for Reviewers

The "Virginia Reviews" column has been an important part of *Virginia Libraries* since it was undertaken by the Library of Virginia's Publications Department in the early 1990s. It was begun by Sandra Treadway, the current librarian of Virginia, in response to a suggestion from Peggie Rudd, now the Texas state librarian. John Kneebone was the first editor of "Virginia Reviews," and he has been succeeded by Julie Campbell and eventually Sara Bearss. The reviews have maintained a very high standard of scholarship over the years, and have allowed us to publish the work of many talented LVA staff members.

Though we regret that staff reductions have eliminated the insightful, well-written, and reliable contributions of LVA's publications department, we have chosen to take this opportunity to broaden the participation in and coverage provided by the review column. Therefore, we invite potential reviewers to contact both Cy Dillon (cdillon@fernum.edu) and Lyn C. A. Gardner (cgardner@hamp-ton.gov) with proposals for reviews or simply to

say you are willing to submit reviews in the future. Publishers are encouraged to send review copies to Cy Dillon, Ferrum College, P.O. Box 1000, Ferrum, Virginia 24088.

With the inception of the new "Virginia Reviews" column, we will extend the scope of the materials covered. In addition to historical works, we want to consider fiction, poetry, nonfiction, art, music, drama, films—any work that merits attention that has been produced by Virginia creators or that considers Virginia as a primary subject. All ages, audiences, and media are welcome, so long as they would be suitable candidates for library collections around the Old Dominion. We encourage reviewers who have access to such materials through their own libraries or in their personal collections to consider sharing their knowledge with our readers.

Become a participant in the acquisitions decisions of the Virginia library community. Become a reviewer for *Virginia Libraries*. **VI**