

Virginia Reviews



Beam, Jeffery. *Gospel Earth*. Nottingham, UK: Skysill Press, 2010. 230 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-907489-02-0.

Putting a very short poem on a page by itself creates a certain risk for a poet. If the reader connects with the image or emotion of the poem, the white space is an invitation to savor the reading and let the words resound longer than if there is more on the page. If, on the other hand, the poem does not engage the reader, the empty paper is like the silence after an awkward remark at an intimate dinner. Following the success of his recent book *The Beautiful Tendons*, poet Jeffery Beam (see http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VAlib/v50_n2/beam.html) takes this risk something like one hundred and fifty times in his beautifully produced new volume, *Gospel Earth*; and he gives readers many opportunities to stop and let a small poem work.

The book, in fact, is beautifully printed, fitted with a striking cover, and produced with plenty of room for interesting additions to the body of short poems. These extras include a passionate prose introduction titled “Illuminations,” six pages of quotations gathered by the author over many years of careful reading, a prose piece and a longer poem near the middle of the book in a section titled “Green Man,” and a very fine introductory poem, “An Invocation.” In a collection of unusual and well-crafted small poems, I actually found this longer piece to be one of the most successful. Its call-and-response structure and persistent rhythm help bring the images to life, as in this stanza.

From rosehip & goldfinch
From storm clouds gathering
From April’s spring torrents
From pond over-flowing

thorn & bright needle
light darting through us
creek’s roaring persistence
swamp’s restraint ending

That is not to say that the shorter poems should be overlooked. They are good enough that I found myself pausing after reading each one, rereading and trying to enter the world they create in such a few words. Here is an example, the poem “Holy Well.”

Hot aching bitter dream heaved
to wind
Ask Time when the enormous
flood will stop ...
Ask away ...

Then sit

The book is divided into six distinct sections, and the variety makes the collection much more than a group of short poems. The section titled “Travels” is also subdivided into groups of poems focused on the Appalachian Mountains, France, Tidewater North Carolina, Italy, and Ireland, allowing the reader to hear the same voice as it encounters very different settings. So, there is quite a bit of variety in *Gospel Earth*, but Beam returns to the short poem throughout. I think one of the very last poems describes my experience reading the book. It is called “Pause.”

Before you turn the page

Pause with me ...

There

That’s it

The ancient place

Now go ...

—Cy Dillon, *Hampden-Sydney College*



Brand, E. Cabell, and Tommy Denton. *If Not Me, Then Who?* New York: iUniverse, 2010. 140 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-9362-3612-1. \$12.95 (softcover).

We happily live in an age where an increasing number of business leaders are also promoting social consciousness and community involvement. But Brand—founder of both the Stuart McGuire Company and Total Action Against Poverty, and a member of numerous charitable organizations—has been beating those drums for decades both from within his own company, where he was generous with benefits, and on the public stage of regional and federal politics.

Brand begins and permeates the book with his own story, as centered on his business life. Its successes, failures, and in-betweens are chronicled in detail not to establish credentials, but to document how he came to believe that businesses and the community’s well-being were inextricably intertwined—and how he went about attempting to better the community with lessons learned. This, combined with witnessing the injustices of segregation—particularly when it was dealt against his own employees and friends—and the horrors of poverty, convinced him of the truth of the question, “If not me, then who?” On today’s still-rising wave of economic hardship, Brand promotes the mantra

that employees should be grateful for their jobs and give all to their employers; nevertheless, he recognized early on that employers are also nothing without good employees, and should treat them accordingly. Happy, satisfied workers are also more likely to become involved in positive ways with their communities. “Doing well by people,” Brand writes, “not only has demonstrable benefits in terms of productivity, but the entire enterprise creates a community of interest that, if properly attended to, thrives and prospers. And it’s also the right thing to do.” Everybody wins; everybody comes out ahead.

Each of the subsequent chapters deals with a specific and sometimes seemingly overwhelming problem: issues of economic justice, education, health care, the environment, racial justice, and peace. Each contains detailed reports and statistics about how far the problems have gone and how deeply they’ve cut into our society. Yet Brand is never pessimistic. After expressing the belief that we cannot rely on politicians to help us—Brand is in fact quite critical of them—he assures readers that they themselves can change their neighborhoods, their towns, and their country for the better. His own experiences may often be very different than the average reader’s, and from a much different era than many will remember, but at their core, they hold similarities that reflect hopes and frustrations from across the human experience.

Brand impresses upon the reader over and over again that caring for each other, and trying to fix our communities’ problems, is the responsibility of every one of us—again coming back to the question in the book’s title. He always puts his money where his mouth is; and though this is sometimes to his own detriment and sacrifice, he presses on unflaggingly, convinced

that a rising tide lifts all boats. This short read—Brand accurately predicts that it takes about two hours—isn’t so much a blueprint for activism as a motivating force to convince readers of their own power to improve the world around them.

Brand never promises that it will be simple, but assures readers between the lines that it is both necessary and an endless font of reward. This is a book readers can return to for inspiration and energy. Brand rarely points fin-

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BRAND AND DENTON REVIEW

gers (and when he does, it’s almost always at failed government and private programs rather than the usually well-meaning people who implemented them), but instead offers a hand up with advice, encouragement, and optimism. In the end, he says, it is up to all of us; but his faith that we can do it never wavers, and in the end that faith proves both infectious and sustaining.

—Danny Adams, evening services
librarian, Ferrum College



Nelson, James L. *George Washington's Great Gamble and the Sea Battle That Won the American Revolution*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010. 376 pp. ISBN 978-0-07-162679-8.

With superb research and skillful writing, James L. Nelson con-

veys the gripping and incredible story of the American Revolution. Nelson’s book, *George Washington's Great Gamble and the Sea Battle That Won the American Revolution*, recounts the events that led to French supremacy at sea and the resulting American victory at Yorktown in October 1781.

Nelson begins *George Washington's Great Gamble* with words from a proverbial rhyme: “For want of a nail, a shoe was lost...” From here he records the actions that prove “that seemingly innocuous or at least minor affairs can look like major turning points when viewed in hindsight” (3).

Using firsthand accounts from correspondence, diaries, and memoirs, Nelson presents history from all points of view—British, French, German, Spanish, and American. Doing so reveals the intricacies of national as well as personal politics that influenced each strategic decision in the nearly six years of war. Again and again, as personalities and Providence altered plans, the reader sees the wonder of the outcome.

Nelson divides his book into three parts. Part One, “An Opportunity in Virginia,” introduces us to the leaders in the war. We learn of their previous experience, their temperaments, and their strategies, and we begin to see the genius of George Washington in recognizing strengths and weaknesses both individual and national.

From the first, when in 1775 he took command of the Continental Army encamped around Boston, George Washington hoped to retake New York, considering that to be the winning card against the British. Washington’s military experience prior to the Revolutionary War had been mainly on the Western frontier, and he “had had virtually no exposure to the open-field European-style tactics that would characterize the warfare of the next six years, and he had

never worked with naval forces” (17). Again and again, however, Washington recognized the need for naval power.

Washington’s first encounter with naval issues came with the need to stop the resupply of the British in Boston. Washington did not have naval know-how, but he had men in his officer corps who did. Colonel John Glover of Massachusetts explained to Washington “that capturing unarmed merchant vessels required only small schooners armed with a few cannons” (17). The schooners were successful, but Washington kept his “navy” secret from Congress for two months in the summer of 1775, knowing that they were not ready to endorse a continental navy, which would look to the British like a declaration of war.

Washington realized the advantages of a navy, but also considered that the Americans did not have the resources to match the quality and quantity of the British vessels that “drove the Americans from Quebec, dominated the Hudson River, carried troops to Rhode Island, took command of the Delaware Bay, and landed the troops that captured Savannah in 1778” (19).

“By the time the Comte de Rochambeau [commander of the French Expeditionary Force which came to help the American Continental Army] arrived in America, Washington entertained no trace of doubt that without a superior or at least neutralizing force at sea, the Continental Army could never win, and, further, he knew that his only hope of matching England’s strength at sea lay with the French” (19). In his *Memorandum for Conceiving a Plan of Operations* of 1780, George Washington wrote, “In any operation, and under all circumstances, a decisive naval superiority is to be considered as a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which every hope of success must ultimately depend” (19).

While the first section of the book is sweeping in covering people and places, Part Two, “Greene and Cornwallis: Looking North,” focuses on the face-offs between the southern Continental army, commanded by thirty-eight-year-old General Nathanael Greene, and the British, under the leadership of General Lord Charles Cornwallis.

Greene and Cornwallis played cat and mouse in North and South Carolina. The British believed that controlling the south was key to winning the war. But Cornwallis

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came to think differently. He did not find the alleged support from British sympathizers in the Carolinas. Frustrated by this, and with the loss of more than one quarter of his army at the battle of Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis chose to head north to Virginia. “Cornwallis had come to believe that the entire southern strategy would never work until Virginia was subdued and the American pipeline of supplies and communications from the North shut off,” writes Nelson (129).

During the time Greene and Cornwallis were in the Carolinas, Benedict Arnold had been sent to Virginia as a British general to destroy all supplies headed south to Greene’s army, and to establish a British base on the Chesapeake Bay. He and his troops ravaged towns up and down the James River. Baron de Stuben, General

Peter Muhlenberg, and the Marquis de Lafayette were there to oppose and even capture him. They were instead thwarted by the lack of cooperation from the government and residents of Virginia.

Part Three, “The Fight on Land and Sea,” sees the focus of the war come to Virginia. The British forces were digging in on both sides of the York River at Gloucester Point and Yorktown. It became clear to Lafayette, who had been following Cornwallis and trying to comprehend his plans, that the Americans and their allies had “the very real possibility of trapping Cornwallis’s entire army at Yorktown” if the French fleet could take control of the seas. The British were pinned in place by the Continental troops on land. Their backs were to the water.

On August 14, 1781, Washington received word that the Comte de Grasse was headed to the Chesapeake with between twenty-five and twenty-nine ships of the line. Nelson writes, “He [Washington] understood immediately that he must give up, at least for the foreseeable future, his idea of moving against New York, a plan that had been central to this thinking for nearly three years.” Nelson says that Washington probably thought that a Virginia campaign based on French naval supremacy might drive Cornwallis from the colony, but that he probably did not think that it would end the war. Nelson comments again on General Washington, writing that “Clinton may have had the upper hand in men, supplies, and naval superiority, but Washington possessed a decisiveness and a willingness to gamble that the British general could not touch, and it would cost Sir Henry the war” (266).

On August 31, the French ships arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Nelson writes, “The British were pretty well bottled up at Yorktown and Gloucester, [however,] and the French fleet was

anchored inside Cape Henry, ready to meet any force coming to relieve Cornwallis" (269).

"After all the blood and suffering, after all the years in which it seemed impossible that the Americans could even hold an army together, much less defeat a powerful, well-trained, well-equipped enemy—and worse, an enemy with an overwhelming command of the sea—now finally, all the stars were aligning," writes Nelson (259). As Nelson's record shows, this did not result from some grand plan. "Many factors, each operating independently of the others, had conspired to let things fall into place" (259).

Washington admitted throughout the war his lack of naval knowledge, once writing that some decisions "partly depend upon a knowledge of Marine Affairs of which I candidly confess my ignorance." As Nelson's history demonstrates, Washington's humility in admitting his ignorance and his ability to thus trust those with naval skill were wisdom that led to victory.

Nelson's book ends with an epilogue, a time line, endnotes, and a bibliography. He includes eight pages of illustrations, maps, and paintings between parts one and two. In part three, Nelson, himself a sailor, provides illustrations to correspond with his explanation of the fleet formations and winds affecting the British and French in the Battle of the Capes. However, not until page 272 does Nelson explain line of battle, "that orderly line of ships that was the standard arrangement for a sea battle in the eighteenth century, as it had been for centuries before..." This explanation, and a description of each type of ship mentioned in the book, would have been useful at the beginning.

Three maps near the front—America's Atlantic Coast, Virginia Tidewater, and the Yorktown Region—are beneficial, although

some imprecise markings on the Virginia Tidewater map render it difficult to understand. For example, there are two dots placed along the Chickahominy River, without any corresponding marking or explanation as to what they represent. Nelson includes a prologue, a fictionalized account of the battle at Yorktown. While it makes good reading, it is unnecessary and even out of place.

That a group of colonies with a ragtag army, but no navy of any consequence, won independence from a ruling world power with naval supremacy is a miraculous story. James L. Nelson excels at telling it.

The author of fifteen nautical-themed nonfiction and historical fiction books, Nelson received the 2004 American Library Association's W. Y. Boyd Literacy Award, given to an author of a military novel that honors the service of American veterans during a time of war, for his novel *Glory in the Name*. In 1999 he was awarded the Samuel Eliot Morison Award by the Naval Order of the United States for his nonfiction book *George Washington's Secret Navy*. Nelson lives with his wife and four children on the coast of Maine.

—Susan Larson, librarian and writer in Fairfax, Virginia



McClintock, Russell. *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008, 2010. 388 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-7154-6.

Russell McClintock, a teacher at Saint John's High School in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, adds much to Civil War history with *Lincoln and the Decision for War*, which examines the months following the election of Lincoln through the secession of the first state, South Carolina. McClintock chronicles

Northerners' responses to the threat of Southern secession via a variety of perspectives and sources, thus providing readers with multiple angles of insight into political thought pervading the North at the advent of Lincoln's presidency.

Lincoln and the Decision for War focuses on three states: Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois. By narrowing his focus, McClintock aims to understand the "immediate origins of the Civil War, the antebellum political system, and the early presidential career of Abraham Lincoln" (7). McClintock's other goals include chronicling a wide analysis of the Northern response to secession in hopes of redressing the absence of analysis of the Northern public's political attitudes and actions as chronicled by Kenneth M. Stampp's definitive study of the North just prior to secession, *And the War Came* (1964). McClintock charts the Republican Party's trajectory toward confrontation with the Southern states and investigates its divergence on the compromise issue of slavery in the Western states, as well as the predicament South Carolina's secession caused the federal government.

Readers watch President Buchanan maintaining the status quo and taking no action to offer national leadership on the troubles brewing, and President-Elect Lincoln navigating the politics of cabinet selection. In the months between Lincoln's election and the first shots of the Civil War, McClintock frames the transformation of the issue of African slavery that Northern citizenry and politicians held central to their beliefs about the Republic, to the belief that the federal government should evince authority to maintain itself in light of South Carolina's secession from the Union. In effect, McClintock suggests that South Carolina's actions caused the North to "man up" due to the direct threat of armed conflict that the Southern

states intimated given their swerve toward secession and the formation of a confederacy.

By January 1861, governors of Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama confiscated federal forts and arsenals prior to officially seceding. Northern public sentiments regarded the actions as treasonous and thus were united by this belief to stand by and defend the flag, no matter the cost. At this point, a compromise was moot, given the seizure of federal property in the Southern states.

Chapter Six includes the experiences of four conciliationist men, Edward Everett, Amos Lawrence, John Munn, and William Kellogg. Each approached conciliation from different perspectives in their specific political milieus. They agreed that the way to save the Union was via compromise and diplomacy through established channels such as conventions, petitions, and resolutions. Thus, their attitudes and approaches represented the status quo on secessionist thought in the North.

Once Lincoln took office, his passive approach to neither sacrificing the Union nor provoking war from the South fell aside as he dealt with the problem of Fort Sumter in South Carolina. Yet his leadership as events unfolded demonstrated his strength of character, decisiveness, and inflexibility, which directly countered Buchanan's lame-duck wavering. Once the announcement of cabinet appointments was made, it was clear what the country's course would be, given its composition of "radicals."

The casual reader may feel lost in this book, whose scope is narrowed to the span of seven months' time—from the November 1860 election to May 1861—and whose players include major ones such as Lincoln and Seward, but also myriad lesser players who blend into one another. The academic reader will revel in McClintock's atten-

tion to detail and presentation of his interpretation and information in this rich narrative. His ability to immerse the reader within the politics and personalities of the nineteenth century is skillful indeed.

Lincoln and the Decision for War is recommended for history collections with a focus on the Civil War. In fact, it should be the one book that scholars and interested readers consult on the matter of Northern attitudes towards secession at the brink of the Civil War.

—Rebecca Tolley-Stokes, associate professor and faculty outreach librarian, East Tennessee State University

Sometimes Stuart seems to inhabit the animal, bringing news of its life to us.

STUART AND ELLIOTT REVIEW



Stuart, Dabney, and Susan E. Elliott (illustrator). *Open the Gates: Poems for Young Readers*. Montrose, CO: Pinyon Publishing, 2010. 83 pp. ISBN-13: 9780982156162. \$27.00 (softcover).

This award-winning Virginia poet, best known for his personal poetry and his dazzling variety of styles, has turned his hand here to verse for children, with delightful results.

Giraffes and hummingbirds, newts and water buffaloes, even the extinct and the mythical can be found here, in a paean to the varied creatures of the animal kingdom. The poet's wordplay is sure to charm young readers and listeners:

A born outsider,
the water strider's
a river rider,

he informs us. His poet's eye notices that the giraffe's skin is a "soft patchwork puzzle." In another poem, he describes the quail mother crossing the road with "her brood pearled out behind her."

Sometimes Stuart seems to inhabit the animal, bringing news of its life to us. What does the yak dream of, on top of her mountain?

Something hair-raising
you can bet, like a haircut
to take all that load off...

Young readers will be intrigued with the speculation in "Ex-Files": "When a creature becomes extinct, / what happens to it, do you think?" As he plays with the distinction between being and not-being—"What does the pterodactyl do / not even available to the zoo?"—Stuart is sure to get children thinking and dreaming.

The collection is bracketed by two poems that invoke the sun. In the first poem, the sun cries, "Open the gates! / I have been down here in the dark too long." At the end of the book, the weary sun confesses, "I'm tired / and almost gone from my giving," as it goes down through the gates until it's time to rise again. As the sun prepares to start up its arc, readers will surely be prompted to start reading again from the beginning.

Susan E. Elliott's exquisite watercolor paintings accompany each poem. Some are wispy and delicate, like the black and white swirl of shell accompanying the poem "Snail." Others are bold, like the full page-spread that accompanies "Iguana." Beady eye, horned spine, and mosaic skin are rendered in bright blues, golds, and reds. In the illustration for "Whales," Elliott uses blocky abstract shapes and a wash of steel blue to convey the "Great, gray sloping" creatures.

Children eight and up will enjoy hearing these poems read aloud or reading them independently. Stuart's collection is sure to find a place on library shelves next to

other distinguished anthologies for children such as Valerie Worth's *Animal Poems* and *The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom* selected by Jack Prelutsky. Pinyon Publishing books are available from Amazon.com.

—Caroline Parr, Central Rappahannock Regional Library



Dunkle, Clare; Patrick Arrasmith, illustrator. *The House of Dead Maids*. New York: Henry Holt, 2010. 146 pp. ISBN-13: 9780805091168 (hardcover).

Readers will be drawn in right away by the intricate setting, quick pacing, and cast of fully developed characters in *The House of Dead Maids*. Tabby Ackroyd, one of many girls living at an orphanage, is selected to be the new nursemaid for Seldom House. On her first night at the house, a female ghost, reminiscent of a non-flesh-eating zombie, crawls into bed with Tabby. Not until later in the story does Tabby realize that the cold, wet “girl” who shared her bed is one of the many ghosts she later encounters, ghosts with blackness filling empty eye sockets.

Dunkle provides a wonderful excerpt from the book—in addition to links for various essays she wrote about *Wuthering Heights* and her blog tour—on her website, www.claredunkle.com:

The old looking glass in the beaded frame returned only a suggestion of features. I longed to see my new clothes, and as I stepped into the passage, I was just turning over in my mind where I might have seen a better mirror. When first I caught sight of the small figure in black, I thought it was my reflection.

She stood very still in the

dusky passage where the light was poorest. Like me, she wore the black dress that proclaimed her a maid of the house, but whereas mine was new, hers was spoiled by mildew and smears of clay. Thin hair, dripping with muddy water, fell to her shoulders in limp, stringy ropes. This was my companion of the night before—and she was dead.

Tabby is so frightened and lonely in the town where Seldom House is located, without churches

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DUNKLE AND ARRASMITH REVIEW

and with residents who point at her and whisper, that she rarely ventures out of the house where she's employed. Thus, it is, in part, a relief for her when her charge, called only “The Young Master” or “Himself,” arrives to live at the house. The child is reckless and conceited; after all, he is master of the house at an early age. He lacks manners, is unkempt, and goes without shoes most of the time.

Soon after his arrival at Seldom House, Himself does reach out to Tabby, in part because he is so desperate for a playmate and is seeing his own share of ghosts. Tabby, still practically a child herself, begins to enjoy the young master's companionship and seems to find him a source of comfort at times, despite his recklessness and ill-tempered behavior. Tabby even seems to enjoy participating in rather

bizarre and disturbing games with him, such as tying fancy knots using earthworms.

The House of Dead Maids maintains an eerie tone throughout as Himself and Tabby explore Seldom House looking for answers to the secrets that the maid and the butler are obviously hiding. The truly creepy experiences with ghosts recur throughout the story, and slowly reveal the shocking secrets lodged inside the puzzling house with no windows on the inner walls. The secret that the house and townspeople harbor is shocking, and leads to a satisfying ending that inspires the reader to find out what Emily Bronte actually wrote about in her classic novel, *Wuthering Heights*.

One of the best things about *The House of Dead Maids* is that it may encourage teens to read *Wuthering Heights* to look more deeply into Heathcliff's character. In my experience, talking to many teenage girls who “just love” *Wuthering Heights*, teens view the book as a romance rather than the desperate tragedy it really is. Somehow they ignore Heathcliff's behavior, which is at times frightening, as when he hangs a little dog. The doors Dunkle opens to a deeper exploration of his character may make a difference for girls who seem to view dominating, possessive, and violently passionate men as romantic.

Fans of ghost stories and of Dunkle's popular Hollow Kingdom series, and those aspiring to read the classics, will all find *The House of Dead Maids* an appealing read. The cover of the book, with its gilded silver hue and hollow-eyed “dead maid,” should make it jump off library shelves. It's a must-have for schools and public libraries alike.

—Laini Bostian, Culpepper County Library 