
AMERICAN MICROREVIEWS & INTERVIEWS

HOME CURRENT ISSUE ARCHIVE ABOUT MASTHEAD

VENTRILOQUY OF LIGHT BY DOUGLAS BLAZEK EDITION MUTA, 2014; 81 PP REVIEWED BY LAURIE SAURBORN YOUNG

Of an ahistorical and gnostic consciousness, *Ventriloquy of Light* is more meditative labyrinth than arc, more philosophy-in-action than careful archive. Themes of impermanence, reincarnation, and enlightenment are interwoven with those of war, aging, and geologic time in this, the fourth in a series of Blazek titles recently released by Edition Muta. The poems here are principally concerned with the mind's ear, not the mind's eye, blurring sensory perceptions rather than reinforcing mythic—or contemporary—images. Every book has its primary force, and in these pages the sonic field takes precedence.

At times twisting into aural riddles, the poems brim with slant rhyme, assonance, and consonance. Continually shifting, the patterns blend and morph, edges sliding one into another, as in the poem, "Wang Wei By the River." In the last seven lines of the poem, the hard "c" predominates for three lines (*causal, course, accord, discordance*). Within the remaining four lines, it is supplanted by the sibilant "s" (mimicked by the soft "c"): *straighten, sailing, salt, sulfur*. Sound frequently overwhelms intellect, becoming meaning itself. Consider these lines: "I grow my soul out sorrow chores / courting ocher to my aura" ("What Sunflowers Have Done to My Life") and "The task of amaryllis / is to satyr my cells, / saturate their catalyst / in alchemical tryst" ("Amaryllis"). Sonic echoes layer so thickly, and in such tight quarters, that the rhythm tumbles forward while seeming to cast back, overlapping and lingering in the ear while the eye moves on.

In this way, and in others, Blazek capitalizes on the delays

inherent in human perception. As artist Bridget Riley writes: “For an artist those fleeting sensations which pass unrecognised by the intellect are just as important as those which become conscious. They intermingle and operate together.” Adjective-rich, the speaker’s vocabulary is rife with nonce words easily misread, as for example: *volting* (as vaulting); *dismantaled* (as dismantled); and *brevity* (as brevity). Linguistic acrobatics play with neurological connections between ear, eye, and their convergence in the brain’s language centers. They also demonstrate the mutability of language (in this case, American English). Blazek’s vocabulary is *mostly* ours—understanding comes, as the epigraph by cognitive linguist George Lakoff states, when “one thing is partially understood in terms of another.” In metaphor and sound, confessions, freedom, spirit, and space are married to canaries and sun, testicles and ice. Constructing a counterpoint of concrete and abstract, Blazek underscores their separate natures while illuminating—or creating—their interdependence.

This is not to say quieter poems do not also bloom within this cacophonous landscape. Utilizing a truncated, abrupt lineation, “Double Helix” is an example of a plainspoken, less sonically-driven, approach:

Each road spirals
to the core,
to heaven’s pearl
below earth’s skull.

And at the core
there is no core,
just the traveler’s
unraveled sack.

Yet the tendency towards enigma remains, this time in the imagery of a circuitous path tracing to the earth’s core, which is also, perhaps, heaven—or the mind/brain. Once we reach the center of the image, there is nothing except what we have carried, and that is “unraveled” and falling apart. Planting images one within another, Blazek builds echoes not just of music but also of intention, perspective, outlook, and philosophy.

“No old poem is old,” writes Blazek in the endnotes, where

the reader is informed that though these Edition Muta titles represent Blazek's new work, this work is the product of a large-scale re-visioning of his earlier poems. In a sense, the books attempt the impossible, a "quantum presentation" of all one's writing, at once. In accord with the poet's intentions, yet standing alone outside those intentions, these poems aim to step out of time, acknowledging the temporality of the human form. Our bodies grounded as they are, sometimes recognition through writing and reading is the only means to traverse the limits of physicality. After all, as theorist Hélène Cixous writes, "You must at least once in your life have realized you were undergoing the opposite of what was coming."

AMERICAN MICROREVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS STARTED IN 2013. THE SITE EXISTS TO PROMOTE BOOKS, AUTHORS, JOURNALS, AND PRESSES WE BELIEVE IN. ALL POSTS ARE CONSIDERED THE PROPERTY OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS. THEY WILL NOT BE REMOVED OR CHANGED WITHOUT THEIR EXPRESS CONSENT.