

between ridicule, derision, and a reluctant tolerance for the ways of The Crows, but when Christophe finds his footing and a few reluctant followers, and when Champlain and the foreign powers that be respond to Christophe's missives with the news that reinforcements are coming, it is not hard to see that the small compromises, the uneasy allowances made by the Wendat will be paid back with a long legacy of harm.

Still, with this book, Joseph Boyden offers readers, maybe most particularly non-Indigenous readers, a great gift: a chance to see what we think of as our Canadian Nation when it was, in fact, their Nations. And to see that cultures as strong as these will always endure. In the words of Snow Falls during her first journey to Champlain's New France settlement:

More and more French are staring down at us, and for the first time I see what we must look like to them. Broad-shouldered Bird with his hair carefully shaved on one side, his cheekbones taut, the muscles of his shoulders and arms and chest enough to make a man think twice about arguing with him ... We are the people birthed from this land. For the first time I can see something I've not fully understood before, not until now as these pale creatures from somewhere else far away stare down at us in wonder, trying to make sense of what they see. We are this place. This place is us. (139)

Kirsten Madsen, Whitehorse

***The Rabbits Could Sing*. By Amber Flora Thomas. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012. 72 p.**

***The Cormorant Hunter's Wife*. By Joan Kane. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012. 76 p.**

Reading Amber Flora Thomas's book of poems, *The Rabbits Could Sing*, is like meeting a sharp-tongued, vivacious, outspoken woman at a party full of introspective, quiet guests. These are poems that demand attention. They want to be read aloud, full of sharp words and bright, vivid images. Her poetry grabs the reader with both hands: "The wasp's body brings the cracking all up my leg./ My shoe holds the danger to the floor" (9). Her language turns her body inside out:

Through my eyelids the sun's red diamond
can't make me go blind, but I'm going to burn.
My thighs tingle until the pores sweating,
my throat thirsty again. (62)

By the time you've read the entire collection, you feel that you know how Thomas registers sensations in her body; you know her opinions and feelings on love and death. She does not skirt around her emotions, but bursts them outward, a mess of images and feelings for you to admire.

Born in San Francisco, Thomas was raised by her hippie parents in the famously tripped out Haight-Ashbury neighbourhood. After earning a BA at Humboldt State University and an MFA at Washington University in St. Louis, she wrote poetry that awarded her the Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, the Dylan Thomas Prize from *Rosebud* magazine, the Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, and an individual artist grant from the Marin Arts Council. She has taught at Washington University in St. Louis, Dominican University of California, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She now resides in Fairbanks.

Perhaps reflecting her pinball trajectory around the country, Thomas's poetry does not feel anchored in any one geographical place. Rather, we are brought back to her body as the place where she is from. "I am in the room between my ears," she writes in "Meditation on Four West,"

About disease: It's no good inside the stout heart
of the colonizing cells; the blackness inside me
drinks, slaps cool waters into my throat,
and sucks air (60).

Many of the poems in *The Rabbits Could Sing* circle around death, asking questions of it, considering it with a driven, compulsive tone. In "Penny's Gallon," one of the collection's most memorable poems, she relays a conversation with a woman who has outlived five husbands:

We settle on the porch to discuss the rumor.
She has had five husbands and all of them
dead; the last one, ashes buried in a gallon-size
mayonnaise jar beneath an oak in the yard ...
Who eats a gallon of mayonnaise in a year,
let alone ten years? How long would it take
to finish such a glob, how many sandwiches
and salads? My stomach twists. I can't get away
from death. It's about to spell my name
on the chipped white porch ...
And there are the deep sad lines in her smile
some men have loved themselves against. (16)

Often her poems follow this pattern, beginning with the vibrant, clear description of some event or situation outside herself, then travelling inward to register its effect on the body, then returning back outside the body to the situation again, coming to a conclusion that offers no tidy summation, but leaves the contents of her thoughts spilled for you to consider.

It is poetry that is effortlessly pleasurable to read. Her poems use a rainbow of colour to paint images; juicy, delectable words that are a joy to read aloud; twists of humour and clear descriptions of mood that, all together, create a collection of poetry one can sink one's teeth into. Thomas's collection is exhilarating and immediate—rather like meeting an exciting, wild person.

In contrast, Joan Kane's *The Cormorant Hunter's Wife*, has a shy, secretive personality. The poems quietly unfold, revealing (after several reads) a hidden message contained in subtle clues and shadowy images. Where Thomas's poems use reds and yellows, declarations of love, and howlings at death, Kane crab-walks sideways around her inner thoughts; she writes of greys, blacks, and blues; she neither declares nor howls. We don't ever really know her inner most thoughts.

What we come to know, instead, are the details of her geographical location. These she observes as though under a microscope, and records with language that is lovely, pared down, and exact. Again in contrast to Thomas, Kane's work feels very much anchored by this physical place. We spend less time registering thought and emotion in the body, more time becoming intimately familiar with the natural world around her:

It could have been yesterday
Trying to learn a pattern of water
On water or a road I thought
Prophesied and never found. (7)

Kane is Inupiaq, with family from King Island and Mary's Igloo, Alaska. She graduated from Harvard College and from Columbia University with an MFA. Her awards include the John Haines Award from Ice Floe Press, the Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Award, and the Whiting Writers' Award. She lives in Anchorage, but identifies with—and is fascinated by—her grandmother's life on King Island. The island, situated off the west coast of Alaska in the Bering Sea, was the winter home of the Inupiaq until a recent migration (ending in the 1970s) brought the Inupiaq to Nome. Her keen interest in the island, the old ways of life, and the world around her propel her poems. In "Legend," we read:

A sixteen-strand sinnet lain on sand
Marks the rivers unbraiding, knotted,
And plaiting their skeins towards the basin,
Where a red-throated loon, shot through the eye,
Yields his largest rib for an awl. (8)

Here we see the movement of the water, the lines this movement creates, the loon it leads to, its eye, its rib—and while Kane does not write of her emotional connection to it, we know that this is where her attention and energy dwells. This is what is important to her, these details, this landscape and waterscape. Thus, you may read Kane’s collection and never really feel that you get to know her thoughts, but you will certainly learn what she pays fine attention to, and you will know the place she comes from.

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***Purely Alaska: Authentic Voices from the Far North.* Edited by Susan B. Andrews & John Creed. Kenmore, Washington: Epicenter Press. 2010. 320 pages.**

***Cold Flashes: Literary Snapshots of Alaska.* Edited by Michael Engelhard. University of Alaska Press. 210 pages.**

Michael Engelhard’s vision for a collection of stories by Alaskans was to keep it clean, short, and sparse. He wanted “flash-frozen slices of life, highly polished micro-narratives that reveal their protagonists and thereby our state’s many facets and lifestyles” (xv). With this framework in mind, he chose sixty-five short stories, postcard stories really, as most fit tidily on one page. Each written piece is complemented by a crisp, dramatic photograph in black and white. Sometimes the photographs capture a moment in nature: a single birch leaf suspended in ice, its many veins black against a translucent background. Other photographs capture characters: a young Native girl, front teeth recently lost and tongue sticking out facetiously in the space they’ve left; a tall, skinny white man with a beard standing naked on a raft of ice poised for a polar swim. The pictures are high quality, sharp, and beautiful.

The pictures depict more than the natural grandeur of the North. They show steamed windows in a well-worn coffee shop, faded painting on an aged outhouse, a toddler on an elder’s shoulders with a house that appears