

Overwinter. By Jeremy Pataky. University of Alaska Press, 2015.
60 pages.

Reviewed by Jamella Hagen

Jeremy Pataky's collection of poetry, *Overwinter*, is a polished debut by a poet who has already honed his craft. The book takes on familiar themes: the human connection to landscape, our need for shelter, our relationships, but it offers fresh perspectives and images. "Rain makes / a child's broken xylophone / of the tin roof," while "a creek cures quiet, / slurs out the unsounding day of pursed lips, / leads by example." With lines like this, I would have continued reading regardless of the content, but the flow of the poems fits this subject matter particularly well. Each line seems to reach toward the next; there's a current in Pataky's verse that echoes the bubbling Alaskan creeks he observes so carefully.

"I left my last family members / for landscapes," Pataky writes of his move to Alaska. He lives in McCarthy and Anchorage, though he completed his MFA at the University of Montana. As the book progresses, Pataky uses metaphor to explore the connection between the human form and its chosen landscape. In "Ablation Zone," the poem opens, "You fluctuate snowlines / each morning migrating over / ridgelines on a tectonic plate / that moves as fast as / fingernails grow." In "Traverse," "silt lines the contours / of our hands" and "ice / warms in our bodies' cells." Elsewhere, the North is referred to as "the globe's neckline." Similar images build throughout the collection, mapping the human body onto the terrain and vice versa, knitting together a philosophy of interconnectedness.

The poems in this collection are most resonant when describing concrete images and the poet's own insights. In places, addresses toward specific people and outside references interested me less than the interior spaces of the poems themselves. The central section of the book is comprised of a long poem titled "Fata Morgana." The poem contains a series of meditative fragments, and its repetition of a specific image of a burial has a slightly hypnotic feel reminiscent of more formal verse, despite its shifting forms and occasional prose sections. But what I found most compelling in this section was the sense, based on fata morgana mirages, that relationships viewed at a distance are by nature a composite of reality and mirage, and are in a sense unknowable.

As a person who grew up geographically close to Alaska, the poems in *Overwinter* about creeks and valleys, about wood heat and glaciers, as well as those exploring the stranger aspects of the landscape—the fata morgana, the aurora borealis, the lonely feeling of being with other people in isolated places—remind me of home. But Pataky will also bring in those who do not live in the North and make them feel comfortable. In “Counting Down to a Destination Within Bliss,” he writes:

 this river is bridged and the vertebrae
 of the bridge forms a catwalk of metal.

 You can wear the rivers with your eyes,
 look between your feet,
 another reinhabited nest, a den

That notion of finding a home, a nest, a den, in any location, is the feeling I was left with after reading the book. Not as something one ever fully finishes or reconciles; there’s a tension in the book between the desire for shelter, for companionship, and a desire to escape those very things. But ultimately, the journey seems worth the effort. This is a book you can pick up like “a note on the table / in the window” and enjoy in whatever space you call home.

Jamella Hagen, Whitehorse