

interest for content aimed at little kids. So congratulations to Finn for achieving this with her first publication. The book is a celebration of generosity and diversity (and Yukon animals!), but it doesn't bonk us over the head with a moral message, and its humour doesn't patronize its young audience.

My son pointed out the "crisp" page design, the solid font choice, and the nice colour scheme. He also mentioned he prefers "the Yukon" rather than "Yukon" –and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. (But that's a very small quibble, and we accept that Finn is in good company with the Yukon sans "the".)

A Yukon Winter Coat is a wonderful addition to the other northern-books-for-kids on the shelves here in Whitehorse, most of which are from our talented Alaskan neighbours. I look forward to Finn's next book.

Deanna McLeod, Yukon College

River of Light: Conversations with Kabir. By John Morgan. Artwork by Kesler Woodward. University of Alaska Press, Alaska Literary Series, 2014.

Reviewed by Clea Roberts

John Morgan's collection of poems *River of Light: A Conversation with Kabir* is a significant addition to the author's strong oeuvre and is a testament to the mystical power of the northern landscape and its denizens. The collection, beautifully illustrated by Alaskan artist Kesler Woodward, chronicles a week-long wilderness river trip in Southcentral Alaska. Morgan, inspired by the verse of Kabir, uses excerpts from the fifteenth-century Indian poet's work to articulate an investigation of mortality, spirituality, and what it means to be human.

One of the pleasures of Morgan's poems is the humility with which the speaker in the poems broaches the wilderness. In an *Orion* podcast on nature poetry, writer Christian Wiman mused how "nature both contains and expels us," and Morgan's poems seem particularly tuned to this truth. These poems deeply personalize the thin line between belonging and being separate from the natural world, "[t]hat

nature can / astonish or appall / means nothing till you / grasp it / with your senses, pump it through your heart" (34).

Morgan's poetic style is both nimble and lyric, a style that mirrors the very water on which the speaker travels. Morgan's river is ever-changing as we see in intimate, close-range observations ("[w]hen a sudden squall splutters and / spits, the river / spits back at the sky" [9]) to the larger more expansive views ("[t]he channel's / a maze of distractions. It smells like / a peppery absinthe, / flitting over the landscape / like small birds who have / nowhere to hide" [16]).

Nature becomes its own spiritual reckoning place with "white caps, whirlpools, church-size rocks" (44) when the speaker inadvertently swims some rapids and sees how the near-death experience has both opened and altered him: "where it breaks / apart the / inside maze has been / transformed" (46). A night swim in a pond is carried out with reverence and prayer: "and / chanting spin like / dervishes, as ice-fire takes / our limbs" (39).

Writing about the wilderness experience is hard because human language is an inadequate means to convey the impact of an environment that touches one so deeply. That's where poetry comes in—it breaks us open from the inside and lets the natural world, the real world, finally permeate us. Morgan's poems flit and twist like a flock of birds. They growl and snort and surprise you like a bear. They swirl and braid and dive like the currents of a river. All the small stories and images Morgan brings to the poems come together to create an ecosystem of sorts in these very wild and very human pages.

Clea Roberts, Whitehorse