

Revard, Carter. *From the Extinct Volcano, A Bird of Paradise*. Norman, Oklahoma: Mongrel Empire Press, 2014. 100pp.

<http://mongrelempire.org/catalog/poetry/from-extinct-volcano.html>

One thing you can be sure of with the authorship of Carter Revard: it never fails to offer a full menu, what the French call *une bonne bouche*. How else to designate this New and Selected with its span of Osage and other tribal creation stories, the community role of song, evolutionary biology (especially dinosaurs), astrophysics and the cosmos, hummingbirds, Oklahoma dust and history, Wall Street, the Iraq War, and not least a run of haiku? Drawing upon the early collections *Ponca War Dancers* (1980) and *Cowboys and Indians, Christmas Shopping* (1992) and the composite *How The Sings Come Down* (2005) in Salt's Earthworks series, together with new work, Revard lays it on you: intertextual Milton and Shelley, troves of learning from Bible and Latin sources through to entomology. If all this sounds a touch professorial it no doubt is. But the upshot is engagingly redeemed by the writing's slivers of vernacular wit, the ready intervention of speaking voice.

The thirty-plus contributions include a number of pieces now standard in the Revard repertoire. "What the Eagle Fan Says," from *An Eagle Nation* (1992), reflects his longtime university work in Old and Middle English, a poem structured as *kenning* with due use of caesura and parallel phrasing. But far from any Anglo Saxon or Norse landscape the world at hand is Native American, one of powwow dance, South Dakota's Wakonda, ceremonial bead and rattle, and above all, the poet's obligation to honor and remake legacy. "Dancing with Dinosaurs," originally to be found in his collagist and hugely engaging *Winning The Dust Bowl* (2001), exploits a fine seam of avian imagery, dinosaur into bird, the transition from the poet's own tribal naming as Thunder Person into verse maker and songster. "In Chigger Heaven," from *Cowboys and Indians*, links the mites being referenced to the poet's itch to articulate Creation's infinitudes large and small. "Dreaming in Oxford," first issued in *Yellow Medicine Review* (2010), remembers a 4AM college waking to a lyric-oneiric landscape that spans Lewis Carroll, Robert Frost and swans patrolling the River Isis.

"Parading with the Veterans of Foreign Wars," from *An Eagle Nation* (1992) has understandably become one of Revard's signature compositions ("almost a found poem" says the accompanying note). Opening with the lines "Apache, Omaha, Osage, Choctaw,/Comanche, Cherokee, Oglala, Micmac: our place was ninety-fifth," it plays allusions to Custer and the Seventh Cavalry and Jefferson Barracks Park ("where the dragoons were quartered for the Indian Wars") into a savvy riff on what the parade now signifies, to include cleaning up horse poop and heading to KFC in its aftermath "given the temporary/absence of buffalo here in the/Gateway to the West, St. Louis." Allusion is made to the Judging Stand, a tacit invitation to history's necessarily far larger judgment, that of how America might or should assess its treatment of the tribes and their plies and skeins of cultural life. Whose "foreign war," runs the sub-text, most applies?

There can be no want of further choice. "Songs of the Wine-Throated Hummingbird" turns as much on the "language" of humpback whales and dolphins as of hummingbirds. The poem celebrates the natural world's different musics—whales "in the sapphire ocean," the "arias" of the dolphins, the "varied outpourings" albeit for a minute only of the hummingbirds. Each, non-humanly, and in Revard's envisioning, contributes "the smaller ripples that we call Meaning." The concluding lines bespeak a near Whitmanesque note, the earth's land and sea as yielding symphony, an ecological chorus. The grasp of global span is typical:

Deep
in the blue Antarctic seas, high
in the green Guatemala jungle, here
in these cracked English words,
can you hear the sing,
the hummingbirds, the humpback whales,
a neutron star, a human soul?

“Living in the Holy Land,” which made its appearance in *Stand Magazine*, ostensibly memorializes the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial in 2006. But its evidently more inclusive purpose is to remember “our Diaspora,” the history that predates frontierism, runs through Empire and the Civil War, and continues into the Oil regimes (“And then the Oil Men came,/their rivers of black liquid gold washed away/too many of our people, to many of our ways.”). The poem nicely begins from Osage creation story as though an anticipation of the Declaration of Independence (“our Osage forebears brought forth,/ on this continent, a new nation,/ conceived in liberty and dedicated to/the proposition that all beings are created equal.”). It closes with homage to song and drum “*that we may live, that we may yet remain/a sovereign Nation in this holy land*” (italics in original). Revard’s keen sense of heritage, tribal past-into-present as never to be forgotten, can hardly be doubted.

Along with a number of wry prose pieces (try his Buck Creek picture of winter moths in “Meadows, Moths, Slatebeds, Dictionaries” or his Dylan Thomas whippoorwill and booze story set in Osage County, Oklahoma, “He Should Have Drunk Goat’s Milk Maybe”), not to mention the often assiduous notes and glosses, *From the Extinct Volcano*, *A Bird of Paradise* supplies a due and timely reminder of the Revard oeuvre. He brings an expansive mind to bear, a beckoning appetite across science and the arts, across geographies from Oklahoma and the other southwest to Bethlehem. The menu’s poetry indeed comes over full, a degustation.

A. Robert Lee