

T A B

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POETRY & POETICS

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Monthly electronic issues follow each annual printed issue. Using these differing formats—print and digital—allows experimentation with design and materiality in a time when print and electronic dissemination coexist. *TAB* will not force either format to adapt to the other. The reading experience in virtual spaces is different than that of a printed journal. The electronic issues are shaped by Open Journal Systems, a federally funded, open-access system from the Public Knowledge Project designed to serve the public good globally. While the electronic files can be printed, each electronic issue will be formatted for ease of reading on the screen. Decisions about page size, typography, and composition are driven by the online reading experience, rather than to merely mimic a print version. *TAB* also makes use of the audio/video possibilities of digital dissemination.

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R U T H B A V E T T A



WHAT COMES AFTER

The doors of the school are chained
and padlocked.

No more children. No afternoons
on the slides, no hopscotch squares,

where the air was bright
and the children's sky was joy

arched above to keep them safe.
This is what happens after.

The deserted jungle gym,
the silent swings.

TELL THEM THEY CAN'T COME BACK

Take them by the hand,
lead them gently to the door.
Tell them they can't come back
no matter how long they stand
on the porch and plead.

The day your mother died
is out there, its hands filled
with dried rose petals. The day
you went to the lake pleads,

holding a packet of sunlight.
The day your husband
said goodbye signals to you
with an empty palm.

Tell them all
that they are gone, reduced
to faint sparks glimpsed,
only sometimes, on the dark
field of your bedroom ceiling.

V I D A C R O S S



OH LORD, MY MAN IS GONE

Like collard greens, ham hocks
hot sauce and vinegar
a man is liable to disappear
some women say

“The preacher”
they’ll say
“left his wife”

The quilt maker will tell the Mailman

The Mailman will tell the Witchdoctor

The Witchdoctor will tell Bodacious
just

to

see

her

face

LOVE ME TOMORROW

She said
you can leave me now
and could'a left long time ago

note is paid
fridge is full

Why you pickin' up so slow?

*He asked
Didn't you love me yesterday?*

*Chances are
you'll love me tomorrow*

*Didn't you love me yesterday?
then chances are
you'll love me tomorrow*

Old man
that's when I loved you without sorrow

You a whole lotta nothing now
just yessin' me all day long

I like a bossy man

I like someone who's done me wrong

So
you can leave me now
and could'a left long time ago

Note is paid
fridge is full

Good Lord
why you pickin' up so slow?

*Didn't you love me yesterday?
Then chances are
you'll love me tomorrow*

It don't work like that baby
I need some sorrow

S U S A N J O H N S O N



DOWNSTREAM

We thought we knew where we were going
because we knew where we had been.
The sky full of instructions. Our minds
full of river sweeping rafts of debris.
What rain writes on rocks even as it
wipes them clean. Mallards upend,

tails splayed and frayed, ready for a molt.
Who isn't? Who hasn't wished to shed
one layer and let it drift downstream?
Wished that life were something one
could step out of, like Godel's proof
of incompleteness, without being seen.

I will never be one, a killdeer insists
as she parades her broken wing. But it's
temporary. It's her territory and she will
guard it to the end, even if there is no end,
just a river's mouth where some cast
out of superstition, others out of need.

J A N E W O N G



Book review

ENGINE EMPIRE BY CATHY PARK HONG
W.W. NORTON, 2012, \$15.95

Engine Empire, Cathy Park Hong's third book of poems, throws us into the domain of empire, where we begin to question the repercussions and audacities of ambition. Throughout the book, rather than target a specific empire, she challenges the very notion of empire itself. Kitsch reminds us of how we construct empire through familiar terms and symbolic vernacular. Indeed, in "Man that Scat," she writes: "I'm a crass buscadero, wild- / eyed thumber, hired killer, / leather slapping kenner, / a no kin outlaw." The empire exists because we acknowledge its existence: "We see the empire rising." Yet she takes that which is visible—including the myths that go along with empire—and makes it implicit. Like the snow that returns throughout the book, empire is both there and not there. It arrives and dissipates within us.

Engine Empire is not unlike Hong's previous collection, *Dance Dance Revolution*, which ambitiously creates a creole language. All three of her books believe in the transformative power of imagination, in reworking the stuff of our cultural baggage. In this sense, Hong is greedy—that is, for our detritus, which, in her recent collection, sprawls across time and distances. In *Engine Empire*, the lyrical, the narrative, and the anachronistic come together in a kind of empire of language.

The book is split into three sections: "Ballard of Our Jim," "Shangdu, My Artful Boomtown!," and "The World Cloud." In each, Hong extends our conceptions of boomtowns and frontiers by showing us how incredible ambition can be, and the language of *Engine Empire* reflects this ambition. Her stories reach beyond the fences of narrative. The notion of progress, as tied to empire, is also questioned. Indeed, where are we going? Are we moving forward? Or is this a movement that simply runs, not unlike a hamster on a wheel?

The first section plays with America's formative history during the California Gold Rush. We romp through the lyrical narrative of our hero Jim, an orphaned "half-bit breed" sharpshooter. The American empire here is audacious and dangerous, as Jim perishes in the empire's shadow, sinking into "the denuded earth." Yet empire continues to flourish without him. In an interview with Robyn Creswell from *The Paris Review*, Hong addresses the idea of empire versus its reality: "The boomtown isn't real; it's full of strange, violent, sometimes surreal happenings. It's my own way of mythologizing California, which is where I'm from." Hong's frontier myths are pleasurably unrelenting in an effort to catalogue "the stuff" of the Wild West: prairie dogs, malaria, fleas, etc. Yet she is careful to point out the dangers inherent in this growth. In "Ballard of Grace," she writes: "But the mighty empire is a false pond." This false pond acts as a trick mirror, fogging travelers' eyes into "lamb-milk." There is nothing alive in the pond, yet the pond stays.

"Shangdu, My Artful Boomtown!" takes on the rising cities of China, overcome with rapid industrialization. As the centerpiece, this is *Engine Empire's* strongest section. Shangdu, dotted with factories, acts as Kublai Kahn's mythic Xanadu. Hong's industrial empire eschews culture and history for the tireless production of DVDs, polysynthetic fur, and reproduction Rembrandts. We see this preoccupation with "stuff" in poems such as "Gift." In this city, litanies are bountiful:

[...] DVDs of every genre-
apothecaries have set up shop, hocking ointments
ointments claimed to be made of seal blubber

to cure inflamed thyroids,
balms as natural birth control,
and imported cold medicines tha'taste
like wincing sweet cherries.

Hong plays with how language changes under globalization. Language here is turned inside out, so that we have “tha' taste” instead of “that taste.” Compound words are strewn throughout, so that the engine of language becomes the language of *ingenuity*. For example: “plaidwhelmed,” “hisshurled,” “mossclung.” At times, Hong's language mirrors that of the hodgepodge products made in these Chinese boomtowns, like a pair of sneakers donning a Nike swoosh and Adidas stripes.

In Hong's final section, thought itself is colonized and treacherous. This futuristic digital world beckons. In the opening poem “Come Together,” she writes:

Snow like pale cephalopods drifts down
as it melts into our lapels we are all connected
into a shared dream where we
don't need our heirloom
mouths.

This shared empire is particularly alien, to the point of historical irrelevance. There is no need for “our heirloom mouths.” She writes later that “all memories / [are] outsourced.” In the digital world, the engine becomes the search engine. It becomes that which is automated. Where we come from no longer matters; this contradicts our understanding of empire, which depends on the violence of past empires. Strangely, Hong suggests that empire settles within us, spreading through our veins: “recall the frontier inside us.” The book ends where the book begins, with James Joyce's irresistible snow. Danger falls upon all of us: “One laborer accidentally swallowed ice / and it caused him to hallucinate, blither in another language. / He was immediately exterminated. / We were forced to wear masks.” Yet the speaker ignores this warning and cannot help but swallow the snow. Empire glows within.

Now that snow is spreading through our veins, what can we do? Despite its grim outlook on the remains of empire, *Engine Empire* wholeheartedly believes in the engine of language. This is a language that goes off the rails, productively so. Hong's incredible ear and voracity for new sounds and meanings keeps us moving with her. We, too, want “the stuff” of empires. We want the sordid stories in order to tell them. We want to swallow the “little lamp” of snow and see what she sees.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Ruth Bavetta has been published in journals such as *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *Tar River Review*, *North American Review*, *Rhino*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry New Zealand* and in the anthologies *Twelve Los Angeles Poets* and *Wait a Minute, I Have to Take off My Bra*. Her books *Fugitive Pigments* and *Embers on the Stairs* are forthcoming.

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Vida Cross earned an MFA in Writing and an MFA in Studio (Filmmaking) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MA in English from Iowa State University. She is a Cave Canem Fellow. In 2010, she received the 2010 Cave Canem Honorable Mention from judge Elizabeth Alexander. Her work has appeared in *Transitions*, *The Literary Review*, *Reverie Journal*, *Reed Magazine*, *Make Magazine*, *WarpLand*, *Mochila Review*, and *the Journal of Film and Video*.

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