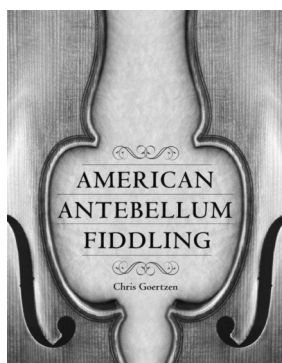


# Reviews

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***American Antebellum Fiddling.***  
By Chris Goertzen. American Made Music Series, David Evans, general editor. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020. Pp. vii-xi + 250, index, music sheets, illustrations, maps, and notes. \$30.00, paperback)

Fiddling in the United States has its origins in the Colonial period when tunes and styles were transplanted from the British Isles and various European regions. During the nineteenth century, there is strong evidence that unique styles developed in North America as European tunes blended in with African-American musical traditions as well as with new tunes that originated within the United States and Canada. By the twentieth century, these tunes and their related styles became associated with what came to be termed old-time fiddling. The term is ambiguous, but old-time fiddling is a vernacular musical tradition that is distinct from classical violin playing and that features the instrument in jazz, western swing, bluegrass, and other forms of twentieth-century popular music. Fortunately, there are excellent collections of tunebooks that document what fiddlers were playing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and we even have recordings of twentieth-century fiddlers who learned to play in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the documentation of old-time fiddling from the ante-



bellum period is scant. Chris Goertzen's new book is an excellent resource for addressing this gap in musical history. Through his presentation of dozens of transcriptions of tunes, researchers can now discover a vast variety of tunes that were played well over two hundred years ago. Goertzen presents and analyzes these tunes to suggest how uniquely American styles of fiddling were coalescing prior to the twentieth century. The book consists of ethnomusicological description and analysis of fiddling from this era. It also can be used as a tunebook for musicians who wish to add to their own repertoire.

Outside of this book, there is little ethnomusicological documentation and analysis of early nineteenth-century fiddling. Nevertheless, there is a surprising wealth of resources that are useful for ethnomusicologists and folklorists who are looking for primary texts for piecing together the music's cultural history. In Europe, fiddlers compiled tunebooks prior to the America's antebellum period, but, as Goertzen avers, there are few tunebooks that present the music of American fiddlers from the early nineteenth century. To resolve this dearth of materials, Goertzen studied the compilation of tunes within these volumes of memorabilia that early fiddlers wrote in their own commonplace books. These manuscripts may include copies of tunes in previously existing printed resources in addition to tunes that fiddlers heard within the oral tradition and even some of their own original compositions. Goertzen transcribes these tunes in Part One of *American Antebellum Fiddling* where he also provides interesting biographical information on Arthur McArthur and Philander Seward, two northern fiddlers who left behind rich manuscripts. This section is especially important for researchers interested in the historical and geographic distribution of fiddling as many of the tunes in these common-

place books remain popular in regions across the United States.

Part Two provides a similar treatment of the collections of Charles Morris Cobb and William Sidney Mount. Cobb was a jack-of-many trades from Woodstock, Vermont, and William Sidney Mount was a musician and artist from Stony Brook, New York. Mount became especially well known for his genre paintings within the Hudson River School, many of which depict general scenes of music as well as specific representations of fiddling. Rather than writing commonplace books, per se, both men documented fiddling through their written folios and in various accounts of musical performances. Both Cobb and Mount were colorful characters. Cobb's life history is an engaging read, and Mount's biography is fascinating. Goertzen focuses on Mount's music and notes how he even created his own version of a fiddle that still occasionally is played by contemporary musicians. Goertzen completes a careful reading of these source materials, and he convincingly demonstrates specific ways that they were part of a shift from the use of violin technique into nascent fiddling styles.

Part Three looks at what can be documented about antebellum fiddling when the art form expanded into the south and west. Here we have the first known tunebook that was published in the South, George P. Knauff's four-volume set titled *Virginia Reels*. Published in the 1830s and '40s, these booklets are important to the development of early southeastern fiddling. Goertzen has written an extensive volume on Knauff's life and his influence on the music, and Goertzen hones his previous research to develop relevant content in this new publication. Goertzen supplements content on Knauff's manuscripts with consideration of other compilers from other regions, namely the writing of Gideon Lincecum of Texas and the collection of fiddlers in the South and Midwest who were part of David R. Hamblen's family. Although there is limited textual evidence, Goertzen does suggest how elements of the dis-

tinctive Texas style of fiddling is related to what can be found in the Lincecum collections, and it is intriguing how the Hamblen documents demonstrate direct connections to fiddling in Appalachia to states like Indiana where family members moved.

Throughout Goertzen's engaging presentation of early fiddling, he strives to use the written sources to answer important questions about the aural tradition of fiddling. What did the fiddlers play, and how were they performing? By delineating genres and tunes, Goertzen convincingly demonstrates that early fiddling was diverse. Patriotic marches were common, in part, because fiddling was linked to a vibrant fife and drum tradition within this era. Fiddlers would perform for holiday celebratory events in addition to the social functions and dances that became more popular. He shows that fiddlers performed in a range of styles beyond the typical reels, jigs, and hornpipes that are now commonly associated with old-time fiddling. Earlier repertoires included polkas, strathspeys, schottisches, waltzes, mazurkas, concert selections, minstrel tunes, tunes for ballad operas, novelty songs, and even the forerunners of sentimental parlor songs that became especially popular following the end of antebellum era. To explore this musical diversity, Goertzen draws from his extensive background in classical music theory as well as his use of ethnomusicological techniques to tease out interesting interpretations from the transcriptions. Some of the conclusions are supported by written evidence from the commonplace books and other documents. His analysis is especially strong when he explores African-American influences on the coalescence of distinctively American styles during this period. Black fiddlers played commonly in many regions, and Goertzen provides written evidence to support his conclusions about their role as dance fiddlers within a range of communities during this time. In this respect, Goertzen's work is an essential resource for further exploring connections between string band music and the development of early blues and

jazz, especially as we discover the great range of styles that were performed in early vaudeville for both black and white audiences. Even though contemporary listeners will never hear exactly what was performed during the nineteenth century, the work of writers like Goertzen provide us with important resources for piecing together the clues to more richly and accurately imagine aspects of this lost aural tradition.

*American Antebellum Fiddling* is an excellent contribution to our understanding of American music. Goertzen provides an outstanding resource for further scholarship that connects fiddling in Arkansas to its Antebellum influences. Many of these tunes are still played in the repertoire of fiddlers from the Ozarks and other regions in Arkansas. With the increased interest in connections between string band music and other genres, including blues, minstrel tunes, and the music of Vaudeville, the musical history that Goertzen has documented will provide a strong basis for understanding nineteenth-century influences on the coalescence of musical genres and styles of the twentieth.

--Gregory Hansen



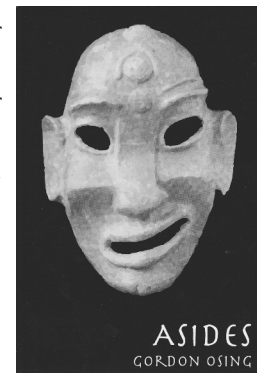
***Asides.* By Gordon Osing. (New York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2018. Pp. 50. \$10.00, paper)**

Gordon Osing has been a noteworthy member of the Delta literary community for over five decades in a career that began as an MFA candidate at the University of Arkansas under the tutelage of the distinguished poet and translator Miller Williams. In 1973 he joined the University of Memphis faculty where he established the River City Contemporary Writers Series, which featured internationally promi-

nent poets and fiction writers such as Carlos Fuentes, W. S. Merwin, Seamus Heaney, and Carolyn Forché. Perhaps his most impressive achievement was his collaboration with Leung Ping-kwan in translating the Chinese-language poet's *City at the End of Time* (2012) while Osing was a Fulbright senior lecturer at British Hong Kong University from 1989 to 1991.

*Asides* is one of his latest in a series of accomplished volumes of original verse, one in which his prosodic skills put this critic in mind of a blues virtuoso. Every poem with the exception of "To the Statue of Kierkegaard" is a suite of sonnet-length meditations in which Osing tempers metrical dexterity and adept phrasemaking with a philosophical bent that displays both erudition and a scintillant wit. However, the book's finest poem, "Vincent Van Gogh," proves deeply affecting and relinquishes all cynicism as the poet contemplates the tragic life of the preternaturally gifted Dutch Post-Impressionist.

While Osing does rehearse salient particulars of the painter's tortured existence in two fourteen-line stanzas, this introspective lyric is no mere transcriptive retelling. The poet's opening is succinct enough: "He found himself unable to be / either a servant to Calvin's deity / or the son his mother lost the day, / the very day a year before he was born" (p. 49). Here Osing is writing for the cognoscenti, those who know that Van Gogh's father was a stern Calvinist minister who professed the doctrine of predestination and insisted on the depravity of humankind. Moreover, the artist was named for a stillborn sibling whose chiseled ledger-stone predated his own birth by precisely a year. Indeed, several biographers speculate that Van Gogh's eventual suicide was precipitated by his perceived inability to supplant his deceased



brother in his mother's heart or to transcend through his sublime oil canvasses the utter despair that overtook him amid the golden braid and tassel of a wheat field near Auvers-sur-Oise in northern France.

Osing lends these particulars a synoptic clarity in lines of surpassing loveliness: "He was drawn to his mother's lost child / to the vibrant fields of his eyes, to knowing / only pictures are real, painting divinity, / color, shadow and light playing with infinity" (p. 49). The poet's repetition of the locution "drawn" is a veritable masterstroke inasmuch as Van Gogh's first passion was drawing, before the deft precision of those lines was blurred by a maelstrom of various hues:

So he was drawn to realizing a lost world, to apparitions the future would labor to realize, haunted and grotesque scenes of life governed severely by pictures, by bleak ecstasies, by roiling skies and seas, ghosted lands and places disfigured by history. (49)

There is more than meets the eye in this poet's gift for wit and word-play. The "apparitions" require "labor" to bring them forth, which connotes the birth-pangs of Van Gogh's mother and also implies that the artist was the mid-wife of his own wraith-like genius. Even the felicitous oxymoron "bleak ecstasies" proves deceptive when one recalls that in Renaissance parlance "ecstasies" denoted a mad hilarity rather than joy. When Osing conjures "roiling skies and seas" he alludes to Van Gogh's technique that employed the quick dip of the brush stroke to catch the immediate moment. One envisions *The Starry Night* (1889) depicting the view from his asylum room in Saint-Remy-de-Provence just before sunrise.

Like the Dutch artist, Osing uses the palette knife without stint, as his ensuing lines amount to an impasto of sorts: "He suffered his world to come to him / distorted, foreseen in dark ecstasies / in swelling colors, earth hungry for us. / He began to eat his paints" (49). If the gustatory image of Van Gogh's red beard drip-

ping with rich pigment appears fulsome, Osing is not circumspect in relating the facts. He sums up a life devoted to the most sensual of the plastic arts in two aphoristic periods: "He felt his heart stricken with itself / himself lost in the command of his talent" (49). Osing's protagonist finds redemption not in the garden tomb, but the dark chamber of a 7 mm revolver: "Only the pistol could be his savior / self-sacrifice the only way out" (49). "Vincent Van Gogh" alone would be worth the volume's price of purchase; fortunately, that is not the case.

Osing's five-part sonnet sequence entitled "*Vaya Con Dios*" epitomizes what William Butler Yeats meant when he asserted that "Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry." Almost certainly the strongest entry is the first, in which he recounts an afternoon in the prototype of those mid-fifties movie emporiums with plush red carpets and chandeliers spilling crystal and nickel:

A matinee in the Chicago Theatre in '55,  
Mary Ford in plaintive harmony with herself,  
Les Paul plucking his electrified portman-  
teau  
and I'm there a proselyte of entertainment,  
how should I know I would come to this  
career with so huge a little reason. (34)

Few people under age sixty would remember the duet of vocalist Mary Ford and her husband Les Paul, the jazz and country artist who invented the solid-body electric guitar that transformed popular music and culture. Osing declares himself a "proselyte" or convert to this palatial venue where he was translated to an arid bliss by a plectrum picking the acrid colors out of now familiar airs such as "Song in Blue" and "*Vaya Con Dios*." The poet shows that he too is big on diminishes when he resorts to the turn of phrase "so big a little reason" (p. 4). He is perhaps a bit disingenuous in confiding that "No one waits my words and they are most / of what I will have proffered" (34). When one considers the quality of most poems in Gordon



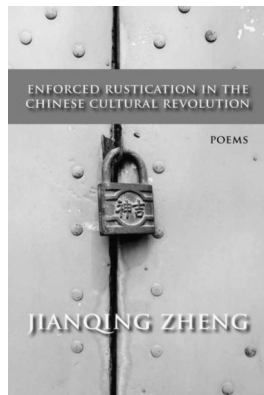
Osing's *Asides*, the somewhat lachrymose closure to "Vaya Con Dios" seems out of place: "So here I am at eighty plus / and still having my say, if closer to / an end of saying I cannot fathom" (34). Most assuredly, there are more depths to plumb.

--Floyd Collins



***Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Poems.* By Jianqing Zheng. (Huntsville: Texas Review Press, 2018. Pp. 36, preface. \$15.95, paper)**

The Cultural Revolution (1966-76)—officially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution—marks one of the darkest times in modern China. Spearheaded by Chairman Mao as a reaction against both Confucianism and capitalism, the movement ended in a catastrophic failure. One of the Communist campaigns during this period was the Down to the Countryside Movement, also called the Rustication Movement, in which more than seventeen million urban youths were forced to move to the countryside to learn from, and labor alongside, the poor peasants. Liu Xiaobo, Jiang Rong, Ma Bo, and other prose writers have published their rustication experiences as "sent-down" youths. Since the 1970s, a number of studies on the Rustication Movement have also appeared. They include Thomas P. Bernstein's *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban*



*to Rural China* (1977), Yihong Pan's *Tempered in the Revolutionary Furnace: China's Youth in the Rustication Movement* (2003), and Helena K. Rene's *China's Sent-Down Generation: Public Administration and the Legacies of Mao's Rustication Program* (2013).

Written in the forms of free verse, haiku, and haibun, Jianqing Zheng's *Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution* is an important addition to the growing body of scar literature (also called wound literature), a genre of Chinese writing popularized by those who suffered during the Cultural Revolution. As a Chinese American scholar, poet, and editor who currently teaches at Mississippi Valley State University, Zheng reminisces about the rustication he experienced almost half a century ago. In a prefatory note to the volume, Zheng offers the context of his poetry:

During China's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and '70s, to answer Mao Zedong's call, millions of middle school and high school graduates, called *zhiqing* or Educated Youth, were sent to the countryside to receive reeducation from poor peasants. They dug the earth daily, with deep conviction that they would play an important role in the transformation of rural China.

As a city boy who received his diploma from a foreign-language boarding school, Zheng found the Communist campaign both unproductive and unpleasant.

The first poem, "Picture-taking in the Cultural Revolution," sets the sarcastic tone pervading the whole volume. Zheng's high school graduation ceremony included a photo session in which each student stood wearing Chairman Mao's badge on the jacket. Despite the photographer's warning, Zheng blinked during his headshot session. Closing his eyes was unintentional, yet it can serve as a symbol of his unhappiness with Maoism; Mao's eyes may represent the impending transfer to the countryside. Although not of an openly rebellious kind, the poet feels resentful even before he leaves his familiar surroundings.

Zheng particularly begrudges the lack of individuality in a Communist culture. The poem “Hammered Dulcimer” is a case in point. The piece begins with the mundanity of hearing the same revolutionary songs repeatedly, which perhaps reflects the rustication. The narrator expresses his delight when he hears the melody of a dulcimer, a musical instrument that “sounded so different, so de-revolutionary, so de-glorious” (2). As a symbol of self-expression, the dulcimer echoes the beauty and wonders of nature, inspiring the poet to compose a haiku:

summer stars  
 jasmines blooming  
 all at once. (2)

Unsurprisingly, when a messenger delivers the news of Mao’s passing, his voice sounds “as cool as autumn breeze” to the poet (3).

Most of Zheng’s poems about rustication focus on the futility and absurdity of the three years he spent—or wasted—in the countryside. “Morning Chat,” for instance, portrays the drudgery of rice planting: “At first-belly dawn, we / walk barefoot to the paddies. [. . .] / We roll up our pants and step / into the paddies to feel leeches” (10). Other poems express the frustration and boredom he experiences during field-work. To him, cotton picking is “as drab as reciting / Chairman Mao’s little red book” (13), and during break, he “lie[s] back yawning, eyes closed” (12). Food is not only tasteless but also scarce: the villagers “never / ask me to stay for lunch / because each of them / has only one bowl of rice” (24-25). In addition to physical labor and hunger, homesickness is a painful aspect of life far from home; after the end of grueling daily work, the poet looks forward to “another night to dream home” (14).

Although Zheng recalls an unfortunate period in his life, he also records light-hearted moments during his stay in the countryside. Even in times of war, soldiers engage in sports, play or listen to music, or watch movies. Likewise, Zheng and his comrades amuse themselves by catching mosquitoes, smoking, drinking, playing cards, diving into a river, and swimming in

a pond. Several poems in *Enforced Rustication* are about the de-stressing strategies rusticated youths adopt. In the poem “Night Life on the Farm,” for instance, Zheng and his associates “smoke / and listen to a serial / over a hand-made radio” while Yi tries to catch ten mosquitos to earn a cigarette (7). In “Night,” Zheng suggests to his co-workers that they treat themselves by drinking wine: “Spitting out tobacco dregs, / I shout, ‘Get up! Let’s drink wine’” (9). The poem “Star Watching” begins by explaining the redundancy of Zheng’s life as he works the field every day and then has nothing to do when work finishes. However, the youths do have a radio on which they listen to Voice of America to learn English. In addition to broadening their vocabulary, VOA, which advocates free speech and independent journalism, may have deepened their desire for more freedom. It is not surprising that the poem ends with a haiku about numbering the stars:

autumn night  
 we lie on rice stacks  
 counting stars. (6)

Many of the poems in the volume portray the beauty and wonders of nature—perhaps a pleasant antidote to adversity. It is clear that, amid hard labor, Zheng drew inner strength and inspiration from pristine nature around him. In “Before Supper,” for instance, the poet contrasts the peacefulness of nature with a military march:

Wind stirs a green dragonfly  
 to rise like a helicopter,

sparrows tumble like falling leaves,  
 clouds dissolve their dark gray

to lacquer the sky into a cave.

In the distance, a military march: [. . .] (15)  
 Other poems portray the splendor of the night sky, moonlight reflected in a dark pond, and a girl picking lotus leaves. Perhaps life in the countryside in his youthful days contributed to Zheng’s early development as a poet.

*Enforced Rustication* is more than a collec-

tion of “scar” poems. Although the poet grieves over the hardships in his teenage years, he does not drown in self-pity. Instead, he reflects on his youthful days in the countryside with a detached tone, a sense of humor, and even a sense of nostalgia. While criticizing the Cultural Revolution, he still fondly remembers the calming power of nature and unforgettable moments with his workmates. In the poems, Zheng comes across as someone who is resilient enough to embrace adversities in life and turn them into a positive and motivating energy.

Zheng is also open-minded enough to view the rustication campaign from an opposing perspective. In the poem “Responses,” for instance, he realizes that some Chinese today admire Chairman Mao while others, like him, do not. During a visit to the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall in Beijing, he feels,

Fifty years ago the whole country  
was blind, dancing at sunrise  
for Mao’s boundless life and singing  
he was the reddest sun in [many people’s]  
hearts. (32)

However, Zheng hears a compatriot tell his daughter, “Under Chairman Mao’s leadership, / we were masters of our country” (32). The poet disagrees with him, yet he also learns that some people still revere the founding father of Communist China. In the cleverly titled poem “Maostalgia,” Zheng recalls his days under dictatorship with pain, yet he also notices the popularity of Mao paraphernalia in China. The poem ends with the haiku

Great Wall tour—  
each souvenir stand sells  
Chairman Mao badges (33)

As a long-time immigrant to the United States, Zheng has a hard time understanding—yet accepts—the nostalgia for Mao’s days in his home country today. Overall, *Enforced Rustication* includes some of the poet’s personal recollections of the rustication era as well as his assessment of the period from an immigrant’s perspective. It can serve as an intriguing primer for those who are interested in learning more

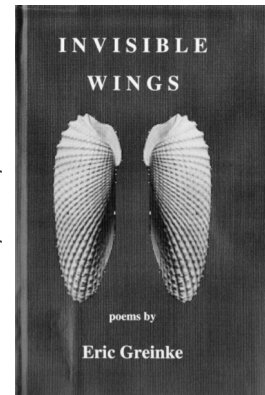
about the Cultural Revolution.

--John J. Han



***Invisible Wings.* By Eric Greinke.  
(Rockford, Michigan: Presa Press,  
2019. Pp. 64. \$24.95, hardcover)**

Eric Greinke’s *Invisible Wings* is an absorbing volume, consisting of lyric meditations of approximately twenty-four to thirty-two lines controlled by a central metaphor that often proves more thematic than structural. An accomplished man of letters, he is the founder of Pilot Press, which published a cross-section of poets early in their careers, including Diane Wakoski, Etheridge Knight, Donald Hall,



and Christine Zawadiwsky. His *verse libre* explores nuances and opens perceptual doors, while his character portraits focus on Polish immigrants, plumbers, truck drivers, and even a brawling pet tomcat who finally meets his match when a large feline interloper encroaches on his territory. Although his poems are not set in the Mississippi Delta, his lifestyle will be immediately familiar to anyone raised in those environs. Greinke writes in a small cabin built with his own hands next to a 105-year-old stone cottage owned by the author and his wife.

The sonnet-length “Overnight” depicts the speaker’s creatural existence during a season of deep snowdrifts and conifers shagged with ice. The first four lines are all the more eloquent for their pared-down quiescence: “A clear winter night / here in my warm den. / The cedars are bent with snow / by the shores of the frozen

lake” (p. 35). Nothing prosaic inheres in this passage. Notice the repetition of incisive *n* sounds in “den” and “bent,” as well as the replication of hollow *o* in “snow” and “frozen.” Greinke follows up with a sentence reminiscent of Sappho’s “A Girl’s Lament,” but devoid of self-pity: “I wake alone to a dying fire” (p. 35). He observes the headlights of passing vehicles on the highway, citing their inattention to the lunar beauty of this late evening: “Drivers on the road / go by but do not see / how moonlight floods the sky. / They just don’t look up” (p. 35). Inclement weather has taken its toll on the freeways and deserted backroads: “Tonight bridges are closed / & travel is dangerous” (p. 35). The speaker too has been a lonely wayfarer, but now seeks to nurture a dying ember to life in the hearth of his own home: “I wandered lost for years. / Now here I am, huddled by a fading ember” (p. 35). Perhaps a yearning for the existential roaming of his youth lingers in the poet’s psyche. He seems to have come full circle and arrived at his beginning, recognizing the place for the first time.

“Mickey,” a remembrance of the poet’s pet tomcat, is comprised of equal portions of pathos and whimsy. Consisting of two twelve-line stanzas, it relates how the speaker’s mother bought a kitten to console him because his father deserted the family when the boy was only eight. Mickey was cuddly when young, but given to pugnacity once he reached maturity: “Full-grown, he fought the other male cats, / heroically defending his territory / from atop the garden fence post” (p. 20). Rolling *r* and *o* sounds in “heroically” and “territory” endow these lines with a mellifluous turn. Beneath owlish moons the mature cat now begets his own litter while the youthful speaker slumbers in his room. However, a challenger arrives on the scene: “After a few years, another big cat / became a serious territorial contender” (p. 20). Mickey returns each morning with ears tattered and neck bitten by the needle-sharp teeth of his rival. Outmatched, he refuses to yield to his formidable adversary: “Although he often lost, he

never quit” (p. 20). Then one sultry August evening, the cherished pet does not respond to the boy’s summons. Maimed and battered, the cat has been shredded by the retractable claws of his foe and has sought sanctuary in the foliage: “Then a raw cat moan came from the bushes. / He’d dragged himself there, a bloody mess” (p. 20). The poet’s mother carries Mickey to the veterinarian, but returns without him. Euthanasia was apparently the only humane option. Greinke’s closure is fraught with irony, and ends where the narrative began: “I named the next kitten Buddy, after my father” (p. 20).

In “Monument,” the poet chronicles the life of a sixteen-year-old Polish refugee called Evelyn, who fled Europe ahead of the Kaiser’s advancing *Deutsches Heer*. From Paris she books steerage to Ellis Island in New York, where she lands work in the Garment District, pumping the treadle of a 1915 Singer twelve hours a day. There she meets and marries a “wounded soldier” (p. 10), and relocates to his “small hometown” (p. 10). Even so, the couple struggles to eke out living:

He supported their family  
trapping beaver in a cedar swamp,  
while she planted and harvested  
two large gardens. (p. 10)

The long *e* in “beaver” and “cedar” lends these lines a dense musicality as does the conjoined *a* and *r* sounds in “harvested,” “large,” and “garden.” The protagonist’s children sell fresh produce door to door at the height of the Great Depression, and later the boy is killed “at age nineteen” (p. 10) on Omaha Beach in Normandy. But the hardscrabble matriarch never succumbs to despair: “Neighbors saw Evelyn kneel / as if in prayer / in her big flower garden” (p. 10). She continues to flourish even after her husband’s death, “until the morning / they found her in her garden / looking as if she’d napped / beneath the dogwood tree” (p. 11). Beneath the cool arboreal shadow cast by its delicate pink-and-white blossoms, the dogwood becomes a living monument “to her growth on this earth” (p. 11).





Most Greinke poems rehearse the creatural elements of various lives, but “Wings” has an epic sweep seldom encountered in contemporary poetry. The opening is a quintessential example of the macrocosm-microcosm image common in seventeenth-century English Metaphysical verse: “The ocean cannot be contained, / but it can be heard inside a small shell” (p. 9). The poet then evokes the constellations twinkling in the firmament: “Stars we named after ancient Gods / enter and depart in a dream” (p. 9). Thus he illuminates the nominative properties of language while sounding the psychic depths of the larger cosmos. The implications of these phenomena prove succinct enough:

They reverberate through  
our collective neurons,  
back beyond the big bang,  
the infinitesimal compact  
of our impacted selves,  
their endings encoded in  
expanding beams of energies. (p. 9)

In a passage almost worthy of John Donne, Greinke insists that each of us encompasses a world in little, that the “expanding beams” emanating from the “big bang”—note the double plosives embedded in the otherwise dead metaphor—derive from our own “collective neurons.” The poet then likens the creative process to Shakespeare’s conception of life, and hence the life-force, in “As You Like It:” “Sweet orgasmic magic of our imaginations / plays on all the pages & stages of our days” (p. 9). Greinke’s closure recapitulates the mood of the more characteristic poems in his book:

We take a break for the sake of sanity,  
as they speak to us, through us and for us.  
Then we cast them into the frozen fire,  
transformed again into invisible wings.  
(p. 9)

Eric Greinke’s *Invisible Wings* is a slim volume, but a veritable treasure trove of wit and wisdom.

--Floyd Collins