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Voyager by Srikanth Reddy (review)

Christopher Kondrich

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

159 Book Notes of the poem still appeals to received ideas about what the body should be in this state of dream-like transcendence. Like most of the work in *Manoleria*, "A Series of Movements:" proves stunning as subtle technical decisions illuminate and complicate the content of a piece. Along these lines, Khalastchi's prose poems exploit the knowledge of literary tradition that readers bring to the collection, offering a wonderful and thought-provoking discontinuity between form and content. Khalastchi writes in a sequence entitled "Bound. Down My Feet. My Arms: (Morphine Drip)": . . . Carried weight I. Walked until. I was walked. Outside . The heat. Shook trees. Lit. Water my far. My children. Would. Know no. Settle I stayed. Talking the night canyon its. Beckon grown praise. Although prose generates an expectation of a linear narrative, Khalastchi presents us with fragments, which progress through an associative, dream-like logic. Just as the human body becomes unrecognizable as *Manoleria* unfolds, Khalastchi renders the prose poem both novel and strange by undermining the reader's expectations of form and genre. The collection is filled with works like this one, in which skillful technical decisions generate new and rewarding possibilities for

interpretation. Manoliera is a collection that lends itself to multiple readings, as the work proves to be as multifaceted as it is finely crafted. *Voyager*, by Srikanth Reddy University of California Press, 2011 reviewed by Christopher Kondrich “The world is the world,” begins *Voyager*, Srikanth Reddy’s astonishing second book of poetry. But the world is not the world; it is how one constructs it. This was true for Kurt Waldheim, the former secretary-general of the United Nations and president of Austria who denied his role as an intelligence officer for the Third Reich, and remains true for Srikanth Reddy, who presents the reader with erasures of the same chapter of Waldheim’s memoir *In the Eye of the Storm*. Waldheim constructed his memoir and, therefore, his relation to the world, colorado review 160 out of omissions and lies. Through the re-contextualization and re-appropriation of those omissions and lies, Reddy invites the reader to consider whether truth can be rendered from falsity and what might be gained by examining history not as a series of events, but as the many layers of the human condition. We learn from the note on process included at the book’s end that “the world is the world” are not Reddy’s words. They are Waldheim’s. Every word of *Voyager* is Waldheim’s until Reddy repurposes them into poetry, thus illuminating the universal nature of language. This repurposing represents “a formal negotiation,” as Reddy calls his work with Waldheim’s text, but it also represents a negotiation with ourselves, with our capacity for unconscionable actions and our distortion of the world that we share. The sections of *Voyager* complicate and recondition our response to these issues by presenting the same language from Waldheim’s chapter in different versions. They are reformatted into a “series of propositions,” as Reddy describes “Book One”; into the ruminations of a professor struggling to compose a strikingly similar work in “Book Two”; and into an illusion of Waldheim’s voice troubling through its past in a book-length sequence of overlapping lines in “Book Three.” Reddy never reorders Waldheim’s words; he lifts disparate words and phrases, sometimes a page apart, placing them in the light of distance, of imagination, of disbelief. Structurally and aesthetically, these sequential arrangements imitate memory’s tendency to sputter across time, to forage for connections, to falsify when the gaps appear too wide. Reddy inserts himself into the fray of Waldheim’s imagined mind as an act of both defiance and compassion. While it may seem that Reddy is simply allowing Waldheim to hang himself on a rope of his own words, there is a real sense of compassion that runs through *Voyager*: “Could this self, born in a stream of sad time, only be makeshift? . . .” These lines, spoken by Reddy’s imagining of Waldheim’s voice in the middle of “Book Three,” pulse with compassion, the compassion from a man who shares the same humanity with another man who, in all likelihood...

of the poem still appeals to received ideas about what the body should be in this state of dream-like transcendence. Like most of the work in *Manolera*, "A Series of Movements:" proves stunning as subtle technical decisions illuminate and complicate the content of a piece.

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Voyager, by Srikanth Reddy
University of California Press, 2011
reviewed by Christopher Kondrich

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
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