

Neighborhood Register

Marcus Jackson

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In Marcus Jackson's first collection of poems, *Neighborhood Register*, the poet reveals himself as no ordinary chronicler of the places and people and events that make up a neighborhood, for his love seeps into every chink in the bricks, every crevice in the sidewalks. From the story of a mother hooked on crack in "Tonight" to a love song of sorts in "40 Ounce," Jackson presents his African American stomping grounds with so much empathy, intimacy, and *joie de vivre* that readers cannot help but feel that Jackson's neighborhood is their neighborhood, too.

In "645 Phillips Ave.," Jackson's first poem in the collection, the poet tells the story of his family's rented house that's been torn down. From the "rowdy rain" on the "moss-blotched roof" to the "coffee maker prattling" and the "sirens that breached our sleep," the carefully selected sounds amaze for their ability to immediately place readers in the life of the poem. Indeed, this poem is just the appetizer for a collection that feasts on such sounds and rhythms. In the poem "40 Ounce," malt liquor is described as "cold gold down throat." The perfectly chosen words glide down in glugs, and readers are left saying a very happy "ahhh."

Throughout the collection, Jackson draws readers in, not only with the range of subjects he embraces, but with his striking, synesthetic descriptions. In "Visitation," readers hear "a couple's voices claw," and we can both see and hear the scraping of their vocal claws against one another. In the poem "Visiting My Great Auntie; Chester, GA," peaches are described as "soft-fleshed as dusk sun." Over and over, Jackson surprises readers with his often pithy descriptions that contain a mouthful of meaning.

Jackson offers readers six odes (the poetic form for praising subjects) in his collection, and they range in subject from "Ode to Kool-Aid" to "Ode to the Bully." Yet it should be said that all of Jackson's poems really function as odes, for each of them rejoices in their subject, finding that even if things could be better, there is still something to love. Selected as part of the New Voices series from CavanKerry Press, *Neighborhood Register* proves that Marcus Jackson is a voice to be enjoyed well into the future.

JENNIFER FANDEL (November 9, 2011)

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