

Slant Room

Machel Eden Reynolds

The Porcupine's Quill (October 2009)

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Slant Room, poet Michael Eden Reynolds' first collection, contains dense, compressed lines of poetry which move contemplatively through the Yukon landscape. Beautifully crystallized, the images in *Slant Room* evoke a frozen scene, one where the animal and human worlds study each other in a fierce quiet. Reynolds writes with stunning word economy, at times writing poems of no more than twenty words; yet these few words are still capable of conjuring a small world. "Frost descends," closes "Chorus," the collection's shortest poem: "The requiem begins." Reynolds' "requiem" here comes early in the book, and instead of presenting a mournful dirge, the following poems exult in the face of a cold and sometimes harsh wilderness. "This is the sound of the world turning," the speaker promises in "prologue (in the voices of swans)," and a listening reader can hear the change of Canadian seasons, the tensions of nature.

Reynolds makes a careful study of the stanza in *Slant Room*, using the spare couplet in places of particular quiet. "A question yawns / the forest bedrock," opens "Ouiment Canyon;" "Poplar buds hover / like warm breath around the branches." Here, Reynolds' compressed, vivid language couples with short, end-stopped stanzas to call forth the frozen stillness of winter. In contrast to the quick scene-holding couplets that characterize early portions of the collection, long and sprawling stanzas appear later in *Slant Room*, examining the power of sound. The single-stanza poem "Castor Gulo" describes a wolverine that "scents blood packed in the far reach of winter / a bellyswell of spring kits mudpacked..." Resonant with consonance, this and other longer poems in the collection echo the complicated sounds of nature, at times beautiful, at times violent.

Tension between natural and human realms adds to *Slant Room*'s drama, heightening the stakes of life in the Yukon. The long poem "Migrations" shows us permafrost and death, a speaker "licking the ice knife clean" in starvation. In "The Refrigerator," we witness a small, yet tragic triumph as "The hunter lays a beast in snow." In the use of this tension, however, Reynolds crafts a small and complicated universe of beauty, one cold and still yet impossible not to find marvelous. His focus on compact language draws his imagery to the fore, making *Slant Room* a study of place as much as it is a meditation on survival—and a collection for interested readers of not only poetry, but of nature and environmental writing as well.

RACHEL MENNIES (November 8, 2010)

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