

aid the artist throughout his performance. As a follow-up collection to the poet's first book *Shapeshift* (University of Arizona Press, 2003), published while Bitsui was still an undergraduate student in Tucson, *Flood Song* demonstrates the mature development of one of our generation's most gifted and promising voices.

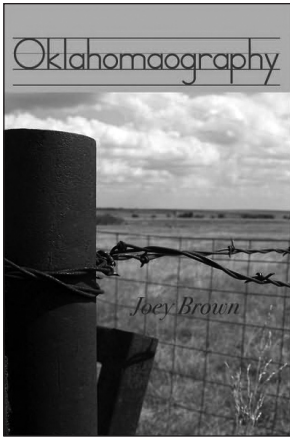
<sup>1</sup> Park, Chan. "Korean p'ansori Narrative" in *Oral Tradition* 18(2), 2003, pp. 241-243.

— Shin Yu Pai  
Little Rock, Arkansas

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***Oklahomaography*** by Joey Brown.  
Norman, OK: Mongrel Empire Press, 2010.  
70 pp. \$14 paperback.

Joey Brown probably won't be named Oklahoman of the year, at least on the strength of this volume, but it's difficult to believe that poems in language this plain and direct could come from anywhere else. In "Tornado Poem" she notes the destruction of "Square house, good house. Been/here



longer than any of us. Was./Gone." In this collection, nobody lies down; they lay down. Somebody "left out from" somewhere for just about anywhere. In "Contest," superior hunters proud of their purebred greyhounds set them on a coyote to show the speaker's father, minding his own business, how good they are as running dogs. When the coyote outwits the dogs and they streak towards the horizon, the father says, "Yeah...they are some good running dogs," rough, shrewd countryman making common cause with the outlaw.

But that's as much fun as anyone has in the book. "Nothing good ever happens on a gravel road," but that's pretty much what the characters have to work with, though on one occasion a group crashes through a fence for a little variety. Characters are only sometimes aware of the boundaries, social, financial, psychological, that hem them in. Expansion joints on an old WPA highway slab say "run-cut & run—cut & run."

Borders may seem porous, especially in recognizing common ground with Texans, but even then "place is/just a state of being." Mostly, as in "Things to Know Before You Leave on the Trip," you'll forget what's really needed, and nothing will go right. In "Breakdown," a group goes on a road

trip that turns sourer and sourer, “none of us friends by the/time we hit Kansas.”

But even these are rare escapes from decaying oil towns with no theaters and nothing to do but cruise the streets and roads. Outside, space pushes against the people as if it were going to swallow them. In “Prairie Sickness,” a woman is aware of geology and “feels a/motion, a sickness, like floating.” Even characters who have somehow escaped the anomie that most are too stunned to name, like the woman with “Ass-Kickin’ Redneck Bitch” on her bumper sticker “in a town too small to hold her” who lacks “a duplicate geography,” though there’s a chance “she’ll rip loose.” Poems like “Stasis” and “Prairie Sickness” explain themselves and much of the volume in their titles.

“July,” a sequence of a dozen short poems, continues the theme of futility as two sisters, town and country mouse, yearn for the comfort the other’s life might give; a boy’s stepmother, silent and unmoving, is taken away and never comes back; a girl tired of minding an empty skating rink waits for a ride to town and hears “someone/coming down the highway, [who] honks, but it’s not enough/to fill the space.” The weather is so oppressive that people sit in the diner “watching condensation on the glasses sweat/the flavor out of whatever they’re drinking.” And throughout the volume, the stench from oil and gas leases fills the air and the breath of refinery workers.

After this knowledge, what? At the very least a protest against the stultifying conditions of a life thus limited. At best an eloquent voice given to too-often quiet desperation.

This is Brown’s first volume. Though in “Wind,” the final poem, she denies it, perhaps there will not be another “day not washed off with soap and water.” In any case, it will be interesting to see what she does next with her undoubted talent for creating vivid scenes in terse and memorable language.

— Robert Murray Davis  
Sun Lakes, Arizona

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***Faith Run*** by Ray Gonzalez.

Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009.

120 pp. \$ 16.95 paperback.

Ray Gonzalez is an award-winning author of fiction, nonfiction (essays and memoir), and poetry, having published over ten books of poetry alone. This new collection is divided into three sections that document a search through the past and the work of earlier writers, such as Pablo Neruda, Robert Frost, Charles Wright, and Walt Whitman, moments from the poet’s childhood, moments from the present, an examination of the poet’s beliefs,