
Mark B. Hamilton. *Lake, River, Mountain*. Stevens Point, WI: Cornerstone Press, 2024. 62p.

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It is fitting that the first poem in award-winning poet Mark Hamilton's new anthology is "A Geography of the Heart." The poem initiates his soulful and lyrical traversing through new and select, previously published poems, short and long. Their arrangement functions like both a map and a commonplace book. Here is an entertaining yet critical literary guide for embarking on, and visiting, many different spaces and diverse identities that define romantic, natural, and cultural places in the United States, the nation's mythical and controversial history, and actual American lives and sorted relationships in the twenty-first century:

On orange avenues
of organonymous skin
where young women
lean in doorways of faded
dungaree blue and red
tin rusted-roofed houses,
where cool spaces
shelter hammocks
near open windows
of breezy, starry nights,

young men walk on dusty roads
beneath their straw hats
to endless-hour breakfasts
as iridescent roosters crow

.....

far from Georgetown bars
and rural separateness,

pool tables rising grand (2)

Hamilton's poetry invites readers on a contemplative journey, from the East Coast to the West; from Boothbay Harbor, Maine, to Portland and Seattle; out of the city and suburbia to the open road; up the Muddy Missouri of the Dakotas and across the Bitterroot Range of the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River Basin. His stylish poetry simulates William Wordsworth's epochal romanticism, T. S. Eliot's controlled passion, and Raymond Carver's minimalism. Hamilton adeptly lifts up America's indigenous heritage and comments indirectly about its pervasive colonial aspirations, such as the Mandans and Manifest Destiny, as easily, and subtlety, as he focuses on a particular object or aspect of daily life, like moths and butterflies, childhood, cats, and "the job market dim, the rent low, the walks / of gentle hands and sniffing dog along the tracks /where vases fill with wildflowers plucked/ from tall grass, and nights cling to bedsheets" (32).

On one page, the contemporary poet shares a Haiku titled "A Mountain Lily." It is a real gem by a mature writer:

A mountain lily
shines underfoot in the snow.
Life is this close. (55)

In contrast, Hamilton's own personal record of adventures and experiences in the outdoors and his momentary pensive mood allow him to reflect upon a past less gritty and industrial but wilder and more natural, as the following excerpt from his long poem "Surviving April on Sakakawea Lake" illustrates:

A precious rock weighs down the tent
nearly floating away with me in it reading *The Journals*,
where Lewis and Clark had camped
with these same northwest winds—the fear
a descendant of fatigue.

In stillness, I learn not to be the target, nor the center
of these tearing winds. Not the origin to be altered.

My emptiness widens
into a ring of warmth that surrounds.
How does this happen? (13-15)

In “One Heart Moving,” the cultivated poet’s confidence reveals how his surroundings are as unperturbed as his sense of self and his deft poetics:

He knew birds and buildings,
cars and the strengthening breeze,
.....
He knew the wild light
in a daisy’s vibrant glance
.....
He knew wheat lands and the Twin Cities,
those reflecting squares of hotel rooms,
businessmen, and the feeling
there was no place left to go.

All these things
he knew
.....
as he drove towards Omaha
with that flat and rattling black bed. (18)

On one level, this sophisticated collection is a critical alternative to Woody Guthrie’s *This Land Is Your Land*. Hamilton’s work evokes themes of inclusion, equality, and the bigness and beauty of America’s diverse landscape. However, the poet’s lines resonate with heartfelt and concerning ideals about the reciprocal relationships between self and nature, too. He also emphasizes the interconnectedness of Native peoples, their ways, and their history to nature, along with unfulfilled calls for reconciliation and overlooked reflections on the struggle, pain, loss, and ignorance that persists in this world.

Overall, this spellbound paperback edition is a harbinger of compassion, justice, and respect for others, nature, and literature in the ebb and flow of ordinary life. Each line and page flows with the desire for simpler things, harmonious living, and great poetry.
