chichi are in the break room of their store, although the setting is only inferred. Monchichi is inexplicably eating a salad, there is talk of a union and ball point pens from Madball, and then the story ends with Madball rolling from the breakroombreak room and Monchichi thinking about her former lover.

The story is thought provoking in that it dwells in a gloomy, mundane world. It highlightings the magnifying power of small talk on the greater emotion of loss. However, the bizarre inclusion of toys as characters only serves to distract from what would otherwise be a powerful piece of flash fiction.

Many of the word choices in this collection are pleasantly surprising. However, there are many sentences where the words seem out of place in a way that distracts from meaning rather than contributing to the overall mood of the piece. In the story "Heir," the word "creepy" is used to describe a stare rather than showing what the stare was like, without sufficient reference to the mood of the scene. In "The Banshees," the word "bonkers" is used after a lengthy, eloquent reflection of the bass guitar, symbology, and myth in relation to reality.

As a work of experimentation there are certainly stories that fail to hold the emotional impact of traditional narrative. Such as "The Onion's Tale" which provides consists of a singleone, sterile scene concerning a grocery store interaction, and then endsing with a sentence about an egg which completely separates the reader from the necessary connection. Whereas On the other end of the spectrum, however, are "The Story of How All Animals Are Equal" and "Pride Goeth Before a Fall," both of which hold great power without straying too far into formational experimentation. Overall this is a work that shows great potential. Runkle proves to be a fearless proponent of imaginative power and willingness to push boundaries.

—Jared Wolfe

Malachi Black. *Storm Toward Morning*. Copper Canyon Press, 2014.

There is tremendous pleasure in reading Malachi Black's debut poetry collection Storm Toward Morning, but it is something of a guilty pleasure, for the poems themselves are often full of pain. Though Black also excels with fresh metaphor and vivid imagery, the book's initial and most pervasive pleasure comes from the vigorous music of his verse. It would take an effort of will not to read these poems aloud. Our typical metaphors for sonic richness—layers, textures—are inadequate. Black's poems are like aural swallows' nests, snatches of alliteration and rhyme wattled together with assonant echoes. These are sounds that linger in the corners of your brain, sounds to nestle down into. The effect produced lies somewhere between intoxication and rapture. Or perhaps it's best expressed by a few lines from "Traveling by Train," the second poem in the collection:

> . . . you've been on
> this train too long to know the time: you're lost
> between the meter and the desperate rhyme
> of clacking tracks. Home is nothing here.
> You're gone and in the going; can't come back.

The traveler in this poem loses himself in the blur of the landscape outside, entering a dreamlike state where time passes unremarked. He dissociates from the familiar ("home is nothing here"), and it seems as if the rhythm and sounds themselves are transporting him to a place of no return. This is as apt a metaphor as any for the experience of reading Storm Toward Morning.

The pain in these finely crafted poems comes most often in the form of a struggle with severe insomnia. "Now there's no nighttime I can own // that isn't anxious as a phone / about to ring," Black writes in "Insomnia & So On." But the poem captures the feelings of frustration and anxiety that might be at-

tributable to any cause, not just insomnia: "give me a way to get away / from what I know." Elsewhere Black's response to sleeplessness is more extreme. The speaker in the poem "Plainsong," driving aimlessly as daybreak approaches, threatens vehicular suicide; the aptly titled poem ends with what may be the plainest lines in the book: "I am tired god if you're not // good enough to kill me let me die." Black's insomnia poems are haunting, evoking both the despair brought on by an irreconcilable conflict between body and mind and the loneliness of a time when one's only companions are the clock and the mirror.

The cruelty of this sleep disorder, of course, is that the body cannot achieve what it most desires. There is a spiritual corollary to this cruelty, and another motif in Black's poems is this spiritual longing that never seems quite fulfilled, at least not with certainty. This theme is most apparent in "Quarantine," a virtuosic crown of sonnets arranged according to the canonical hours of Christian monastic traditions, from lauds to matins. In a note, Black calls it "a poem to the possibility of God." These ten linked sonnets (two of which first appeared in *Pleiades*) move along a spectrum between doubt and hopefulness about this divine possibility. "I can forget. / And like the sea, / one more machine without a memory, / I don't believe that you made me," Black writes in "Lauds," the first sonnet in the corona. In the second, "Prime," the speaker says, "I think I see you in the wind / but then I think I see the wind." The God in these sonnets is known, if at all, as "a hint in things," or as "the gulf / between the hoped-for / and the happening." God as the absent presence, or the present absence.

Yet it is also in "Quarantine" that Black's music makes itself felt most viscerally, as though the longed-for possibility of God manifests itself in what one poem calls "the rapturous, proud swell of darkling sounds." In two of the sonnets in particular, "Compline" and "Vigils," the aural patterns are so dense they approach the undulating repetitions of glossolalia. It's tempting to quote these sonnets in full, but a sampling from "Vigils" will have to suffice:

> . . . there is again
> and born again: there is the forming and:
> the midnight curling into morning and
>
> the glory and again: there is no end:
> there is the blessing in an and and an again:
> the limitlessly yessing of began
>
> begins incessantly again . . .

Here the poem celebrates newness and the continuation of life, midnight into morning, "an and and an again." It's hard to say exactly what has changed for the speaker when we reach the final sonnet in the sequence, "Matins," but something indelibly has—some new understanding of the self achieved through a search for the divine other.

Just about any crown of sonnets is a remarkable artistic achievement. But one that enacts a profound spiritual quest and arrives at legitimate insight—without the didacticism or cloying airiness of so much spiritual poetry—is a feat not only of consummate formal skill but also of courage of heart and humility of spirit. This poem alone is worth the price of the book. But there so many fine poems in the collection, I'm sure that, like most guilty pleasures, I'll return to it again and again.

—Brent Newsom

Storm Toward Morning by Malachi Black (review)

Brent Newsom

Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 36, Number 2, Summer 2016 (Book Review Supplement 13.1), pp. 60-61 (Review)

Published by Department of English and Philosophy, University of Central Missouri
DOI: 10.1353/plc.2016.0110