

Book Review I

'The Storm Generation Manifesto'

Kentucky poet's collection filled with longing

By Mary Popham • Special to The Courier-Journal • July 31, 2010

The voice of the narrator in “The Storm Generation Manifesto; and On Parting, The Wilderness Poems,” by Kentucky poet Ron Whitehead, is of loneliness and longing. Sometimes his words are like memory seizures, burst from a light strobe. One such poem that I find particularly intriguing is an alphabetical listing in “woodsmoke.” With no punctuation, the word choice is not for the images alone but also for the sounds of the syllables. A flash, a signal, and then the word is overtaken by another — like woodsmoke itself:

“amethyst asphodel azure bronze copper
diamond dust ebony emerald gold indigo
jade jasper lavender opal pearl pine resin
sapphire silver turquoise water wine woods woodsmoke”

Whitehead's poetry often repeats thoughts of Daddy, Mama, dreams, home at last, home to home, going for home — surrounded by other wistful, nostalgic images: a coal-train whistle, a farmhouse, railroad tracks and rusted bridge, a bobwhite, songs filled with love, a bamboo pole and catfish.

This poet has traveled all across America from the fountain in St. James Court, Louisville to far countries, giving more than 6,000 readings. In Russia, Iceland, England, Ireland, Scotland and Nicaragua he searches for spiritual brothers, “cosmic grace.” He met His Holiness The Dalai Lama and co-wrote “Never Give Up”:

“ ... Too much energy in the world
Is spent developing the mind
Instead of the heart
Develop the heart ... ”

Whitehead co-wrote this collection's title poem, “The Storm Generation Manifesto,” with Icelandic novelist and friend Olafur Gunnarsson, during a climb to the top of The Viking Mountain in Iceland. It speaks to the gentler side of “the honest, fierce, brutal” poets to expose the “non-violent spiritual warriors.” Excerpts from this long poem:

“ ... we are creative expression
we blow away lies and injustice
... we are kind we have soft hearts
... we are God's open nerve... ”

One of my favorite poems, titled “go down,” may have come from this trip to Iceland. Like many other poems in the book, it is very small with a huge message: “sometimes necessary/ to go down/ when climbing/ mountain.”

But the book ends with a very long poem, “The Revolutionary Theatre of the Divine Imagination.” It is a longing, a prayer, a dedication for “all who find the courage to be their dream.” For the full impact of the poet's performance skills, the first edition includes a CD and DVD.

Mary Popham is a writer and critic who lives in Louisville.

BOOK REVIEW

The Storm Generation Manifesto

By Ron Whitehead

Holland Brown

First edition includes audio recording and film of the recording and interviews

58 pp. \$25