

For Finkelstein, the connection of past to present seems to be a matter of correspondences, in the Swedenborgian sense of the word as an analogy between specific things in the physical and spiritual realms. In “Tag, You’re It”—a poem dedicated to Peter O’Leary—Finkelstein writes, “The things above / are as the things below,” an idea he elaborates upon in many other pieces in *Inside the Ghost Factory*, most notably in the title poem. Here, Finkelstein describes our relation to the ghostly inhabitants of the otherworld:

It has been said
that the living press down upon them, though
they press down upon us too, until we are

indistinguishable.

There’s an intimate correspondence between the quotidian and the spiritual here. The poem ends with the repeated assertion, “They are hiring allegorists again.” It is not a minor occupation: Dante was an allegorist, after all.

Robert Archambeau

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Jena Osman, *The Network*. Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2010. 115pp. \$17.95

Language economies run parallel to economies of capital—where they chance to intersect is where Jena Osman finds her poetry. In *The Network*, she foregrounds these intersections by interspersing etymological charts with economic histories. “Rather than invent a world,” Osman writes, “I want a different means to understand this one. I follow Cecilia Vicuña’s instruction to use an etymological dictionary: “To enter words in order to see.” What Osman sees is that language marks shifts in culture to reveal inextricable links to capital. After outlining the etymological connections between “paciscere” and both “peace” and “propaganda,” for example, Osman announces, “derivatives include appease and pay.” Locating a critique within the etymology of the words themselves, Osman suggests that forms of life have devolved into exchange value and political spectacle.

Osman is a poetic collator, a creative editor of historical documents. She finds poetry in accidents of history, in the cultural lapsus that an etymological tree reveals. But her creative editing also blurs into poetic writing; like Susan Howe, another poet who has made much of historical singularities, Osman often writes a carefully disguised pastiche. In one poem, she invents a story

of a balloonist who “lands by accident” on “an imaginary island, the perfect system.” But this “perfect system” is also one of accident, where “the mistake shows the way.” Osman tells us that some “he” has invented this “imaginary island”—whoever “he” is. (A mistake personified?) She switches back and forth between documented historical fact and imaginative speculation, from the story of the balloonist to etymological charts to Thomas More references and quotes from *Klein’s Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, using the balloonist character as a touchstone throughout this first section. Rapid association is inevitable when one starts tracing language, Osman’s technique suggests. She writes, “My trouble is in tracking, using only straight lines. The wind sets me off course so I will not arrive. Birds puncture the balloon so I will not fly. An island explodes below so I will not land.” Osman, like her balloonist, seems both thrilled and terrified by the contingencies she must encounter. The relation between words is “not causal, but a knot. of derivations and kinships.” The poet takes advantage of these kinships, and provokes us to make use of them and to write beyond them. This impulse to write beyond is what distinguishes her work from other writers who have been influenced by the Language tradition, including Conceptualist poets of the present moment. Osman’s managed texts are capable of critique.

This is true also of the poems that rely on systematic, rather than accidental, etymological tracking. In such poems, the system of language is structurally homologous to economic structures. The second section of *The Network*, “The Joker,” discovers latent connections between the history of the word “joker” and the commercial history of sugar. Osman’s joker is a literary figure who “can comment on the king’s law” and an entertainer who enacts our social prejudices by wearing blackface; “joker” is also legal jargon, meaning “a hidden clause in an otherwise transparent law.” Osman’s source lexicon is the 1912 Congressional hearings held to investigate the monopoly powers of the American Sugar Refining Company. These hearings investigated the legal “joker” that caused importers of white sugar to pay a prohibitively higher tariff than the one on unrefined, darker-colored sugars—a standard that “had no bearing on whether or not sugar was high quality.” The only difference between the sugars, aside from cost, was that one was not as “white and pretty” as the other. Osman’s etymologies uncover social and economic prejudices, suggesting that the legacy of slavery remains in the strata of the words we speak. The joker’s history in mummies’ parades and blackface unmasks the racism that still lurks behind the joker’s painted face.

The book’s longest section, “Financial District,” sets toponomic and economic histories of streets in New York—Wall Street in particular—across the page from networks of historically related words. Osman also pairs economic

terms such as “finance” and “commerce” with street addresses in New York’s Financial District. (Zuccotti Park will surely gain new currency as a locus of dissent in an updated map; Osman’s book predates the Occupy movement.) Her history begins with Henry Hudson’s discovery of Manhattan in 1609 and ends with the explosion of dynamite—the so-called Wall Street bombing—outside the J. P. Morgan Bank at 23 Wall Street in 1920. Osman declares that at this precise moment, 12:01 p.m. on September 16, 1920, “Wall Street and the financial markets become a patriotic symbol; questioning the economic system becomes anti-American.” Capital’s wounding and embattlement fuses it with the American conscience. Like our words, our patriotic values are prone to sudden shifts. That moment is a singular pivot in an economic system that runs by cycles of crisis. Osman links the word “commerce” to “mercurial” and “quicksilver.” The way to map a changing thing, she argues by example, is by means as changeable as the thing mapped. The book’s final section, “Mercury Rising (A Visualization)” tells the indubitably weird story—if it is indeed only *one* story—of a journey through a futuristic dream-escape in which the body is rendered mercurial. As if it were ever otherwise.

Kate McIntyre

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Joshua Baldwin, *The Wilshire Sun*. New York: Turtle Point Press, 2011. 104pp. \$10.50

Halfway through *The Wilshire Sun*, Jacob, the novella’s lazy and deluded narrator, stands outside a grand hotel in Santa Monica and imagines a hackneyed plot arc for himself. A literary young man, he has already come to Los Angeles from New York at the behest of his friend Jerry to collaborate on “making easy money setting down screenplays both dumb and brilliant.” Looking at the hotel, he first envisions it as the backdrop for gaining and losing glamor, then concludes that it might be easier to just skip ahead to the final humbling he predicts for himself:

I...considered blowing what remains of my inheritance by staying in one of their suites. Eating breakfast in the lobby while staring at the sea, meeting an actress, marrying her, going into severe debt; then she leaves me, so I become a bellhop at the Ross.

I spent the night at a motel on Main Street, thinking over this plan, and right now it doesn’t sound like such a terrible way to proceed. Better yet, I can skip those preliminary steps and cross straight over to the bellhop stage.