

Books from two independent Minnesota presses are featured in this *Synecdoche*. Coffee House Press established in 1984 has the mission to build, “on the best traditions of publishing and the book arts, [to] produce books that celebrate imagination.” Tinderbox Editions, the newer press, established in Red Wing in 2015, showcases a robust list of titles to debut this year and next, coupled with impressive quality and community commitment.

The Falling Down Dance by Chris Martin, Coffee House Press, 2015, 76p, paper, \$16.95 • *The Falling Down Dance* is Chris Martin’s third full-length collection of poetry. Only twenty-five poems make up this contemplative collection on early fatherhood, stalled-out winters, and moments of daybreak sliced with memories prior to parenthood. The poems themselves are comprised of shorter lines that cleverly break and expertly rebuild language. Simply glancing at the table of contents is a study of lineation; left justified are thirteen poems that start with “Time.” Placed interstitially, and across the page, are poems, whose titles read almost like a school schedule: “Language,” “Business,” “Dance,” and “Art.” Indeed, much of *The Falling Down Dance* is about the act of watching language acquisition, coaching someone into taking initial steps, what it is to teach someone to sleep. These observations occur from a position that moves from neutrality to passion— what it is to be a parent.

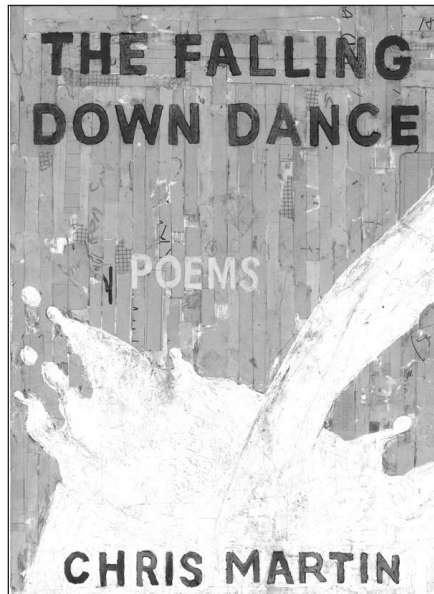
The first poem, “Time (ash)” skitters between last/first and old/new: “The last star. / The oldest living insect. / The first bloody lip. / Then we fall asleep / under the rotting walnut tree / in the hopelessly sloped / backyard of the oldest house / in town.” Grammar and lineation fall away at the end of the poem, so that only words remain, “the world’s / oldest tree / . . . becomes / tragedy / almanac / timber / house / fire / snow,” which creates a parallel that runs the length of the collection—between language building poems and people building a person.

Motherhood, more than fatherhood, seems to imbue pockets of contemporary poetry. So, Martin’s focus from the

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BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

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father’s perspective is welcome, if not stark: “the shipwreck / of fatherhood” moves from the language of pregnancy books that compare a growing embryo to “a raspberry / then a prune, a peach.” Thankfully, the speaker’s fears are not realized, metaphors between flora and fauna and voracious viability have not stopped after the baby’s safe delivery. The crying baby is now a “[b]eached pink nurse / shark, bald and toothy,” but as the father approaches the crib, “he’s so happy to see me he’s / shaking.”

In the collection, time and milestones blur by, but moment memories freeze in Midwest winters, like in the poem “Dance,” where a baby learning to walk is described as a “taut body that keeps building / itself like a winter / turnip.” Once the child is walking, the father asks, “Does he get bigger or does / the world shrink before him,” and it is this question of perspective, as well as desire preceding ability, that so suitably pinpoints the paradox of parenthood that is both selfish and selfless. *The Falling Down Dance* is a candid collection that names parenthood, a sudden love born from a steady love, as witness to life’s beginning, when it’s fragile, but also destructive.

Ventriloquy by Athena Kildegaard, Tinderbox Editions, 2016, 91p, paper, \$15.00 • Athena Kildegaard’s fourth collection, *Ventriloquy*, is a collection of manifold poems playfully aware of their language and generative process. The collection is divided into four sections: poems named after flowers, each eight lines long; poems about imagined saints, where the title leads into the first line; a section titled “Divinations,” where the poems are more narrative, each poem consists of three quatrains; and lastly, a section of still lifes in prose poetry.

The flower poems boldly embrace the literal world of the birds and bees, with fecund and titillating images from biology. In “The Daises,” the simple rhyme, “he loves me, he loves me not—” blooms to double entendre: “until one petal remains / slender and white— / the stylus of desire.” The world of gossipy gardens is an easy delight for readers to enter, where flowers are given agency. Fuchsias become, “The wives of the plumbers and electricians / [who] took off their earrings last.”

The imagined saint poems are rife with images that continually revise and rename its subject. In “The Saint of Kisses,” details from secret trysts emerge, an adjective and noun at a time: “cobwebbed and dank, / cedar, dust mite, lavender, mortar.” Poems such as “The Barbed Wire Saint” and “The Plastic Saint” examine man’s consequential manipulation of the environment: “The plastic saint knew our secrets. / She tucked us up tight nighty-night night-night. / . . . She got under our skin.” Kildegaard continues to scrutinize man’s role, or imagined role, in the last section of still life poems, as though holding something stationary provides a better viewing opportunity: “an astronomer crouches unseen with his rudimentary glass, certain that other impertinent universes swirl beyond, but unable to speak of them adequately.”

Ventriloquy is an accomplished collection from a poet who knows her craft well. Within a flower is the universe, and within the universe are “lilies and marigolds.” *Ventriloquy* embraces both the metaphysical and physical, leaving the reader blushing and dazzled in lines that constantly rush forward, seeking more precision of voice and experience. □