

Crude by Taylor Brorby, Ice Cube Press, 2017, 87p, paper \$14.95 • One of the last poems in *Crude* moves from title to first line, “I Suppose The World / finds the prairie drab. / Brown, mottled, void of verticality, no / beauty,” but Brorby’s first collection of poetry, *Crude*, is a vivid pastoral guide to the land of sage, buttes, and bison. *Crude* is part childhood nostalgia for fishing and hiking on the expansive prairie landscape, but also part omen, speaking to the damage of fracking, the dangerous process used to extract oil and gas from subterranean rock beds, happening in North Dakota.

If a collection can be both ode and elegy, *Crude* constructs itself as such. Many of the poems are apostrophes, praising valleys, buttes, and birds, but by the middle of the collection, the poems also question and implicate oil and pump jacks. With concision, Brorby collapses geologic time in terse images: “as pump jacks pulled dinosaur blood” or “[m]y playground, the glacier’s footprint.”

In fact, landscape plays such a large role in the book, often with a single speaker resting atop a butte, observing distant pump jacks as a “circle of flares,” that the reader is lulled into a hazy sense of serenity until Brorby reminds the reader it is man’s “green greed” for oil that is devastating the prairie and world: we “watched reality television while / extinction, desecration, slipped in.”

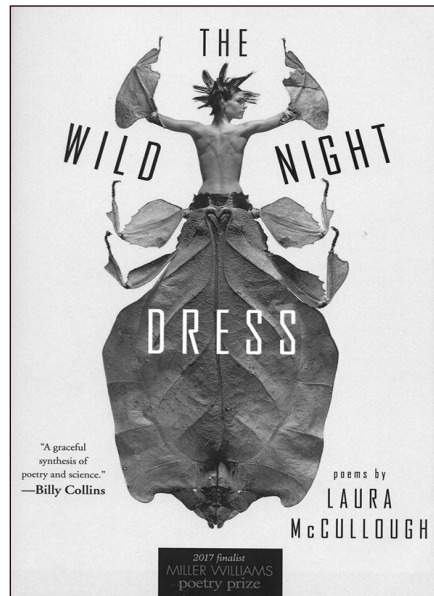
Brorby is careful to situate *Crude* in America’s great burning prairie, a place all too familiar with the shortsightedness of man: removing Native Americans from their homes, endangering bison and native prairie grasses, and now Brorby cautions us against digging into the “bloodlines of the land.” I read this collection a few weeks after the last Water Protector was forcibly removed from Standing Rock, and with history poised to repeat itself, *Crude*, an accomplished treatise from an emerging writer, dares us to resist and “[r]isk hope.”

The Wild Night Dress by Laura McCullough, The University of Arkansas Press, 2017, 100p, paper \$17.95 • Selected as a 2017 finalist for the Miller Williams Poetry Prize by Billy Collins, Laura McCullough’s latest book, *The*

Synecdoche

BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

RACHEL MORGAN



Wild Night Dress, is a union of science and poetry that accounts for life after destructions. McCullough knows that a poet’s job is to discuss two different things at once, and so many of the poems employ the unbiased language of science: “In physics, when two particles meet, / even when separated, they are never / really apart, still effect [sic] the other;” to discuss the most intimate of losses: the death of a mother and the dissolution of a long marriage.

With experimental use of white space and punctuation, these poems scatter over the page, open, barefaced, looking back, not to make sense of events, but to accept them. Both bodies of water and familiar bodies are dismantled: “having lost the body / I came into this world through, and my husband’s / as well.” McCullough breaks these bodies down to their elements, “we are water... / The body : 60% :: The world : 70%.” And it is through the breaking that particles realign, a life rebuilds itself, “like ocean, / and wonder if we will have to grip each other / not to avoid destruction, but to transform.”

McCullough’s collection is expansive with some poems occupying the paradox of domestic work—work that is done only to be undone—feeding that returns to hunger, and other poems use theories of theoretical physics to find consolation. *The Wild Night Dress* is a collection of forfeiture that is resilient.

Filthy Labors by Lauren Marie Schmidt, Northwestern University Press, 2017, 90p, paper \$17.95 • *Filthy Labors*, Lauren Schmidt’s, fourth collection, is a judicially curated collection of poems that explores being a daughter in a multigenerational home and working at a homeless shelter for young mothers. Schmidt masterfully shifts between these divergent worlds, ultimately illustrating being a part of any family is continuance and a desire for belonging: “I imagine the two of them breathing me into being, each . . . / assigning to me the best they see in themselves. / Instead, your mother named you Brittany, trying not to see / the food stamps, the too-thin walls.”

Structurally, *Filthy Labors* is delightfully complex, highlighting a mastery of forms, such as villanelle, pantoum, and ghazal. The book itself is organized into sections, each titled for a Catholic sacrament with an epigraph from Walt Whitman. Indeed, much of the book rings with Whitman’s call for social justice, but more subtly, his time as a nurse to wounded Civil War vets, and his comfort, delight even, with the human body. Boldly, these poems explore caring for aging parents, nursing homes, and aging bodies breaking down: “tongues twitch and writhe like gray, salt slugs / as trays of food cool before toothless mouths.”

Communion is an image that frequently appears toward the end, and in a world bereft of a god, the goodness and grace is supplied from those around us: a lover in an empty apartment, recognizing the sounds of her neighbor; taboo, but desired sex; a teenage mother sharing “bits of briny meat” and “mush” from her McDonald’s bag with her “toothless” son in a homeless shelter. *Filthy Labors* is a collection of songs, calling poetry to its highest order: to sing for those who have lost the ability to speak or never knew they had a voice. □