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on Matthew Graham

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other means — striking images, inlays of paradox of irony, nuances of rhythm — without which the reader too easily says yea or nay, without involvement, as Kooser knows, and as the best poems clearly demonstrate; they are models of brevity and wonders of intriguing clarity.

Kooser's is a colloquial, rather than a vernacular, language, easier on the ears of maiden aunts than David Lee's, for instance (though I suspect there's plenty of maiden aunts who'd adore Lee's "Jan's Birthday"), but so finely attuned to the mysteries of the commonplace that one is wonderstruck by this poet's unassuming but unerring sense of the human center.

Whether it's laundry hanging on a line by a pink house trailer, "A Monday in May," "The Giant Slide," or "The Fan in the Window," Kooser has a real pro's hand at sending home-made kites clear to the moon. Nothing is so prosaic that it will not yield a poem, a real poem, whether it's "An Empty Shotgun Shell" or "Cleaning a Bass." And no one makes it all look easier than this fellow who makes his living as vice-president of a life insurance company in Lincoln, Nebraska.

It's farther from Kooser's Nebraska to Wallace Steven's Connecticut than any map suggests, but not so very far to Kansas and Oz, though for Kooser "the tin man" has become "The Voyager II Satellite." That Kooser can employ a plain speech so habitually understated as the Midwest's tends to be, and can do so in the service of such irresistible poems, is evidence to prove Kooser's claim that "the world is alive/with such innocent progress." It is also evidence that neither Madison Avenue nor politics has yet succeeded in numbing our great mother tongue.

Either of these books could make a great place to start for those readers who might feel intimidated by Modern and contemporary poetry in general. For the rest of you, Kooser's several previous books may be familiar already, but David Lee's work is not so likely to be known. In either case, good reading is ahead.

-William Pitt Root

Matthew Graham, *New World Architecture*; Galileo Press; Baltimore, 1985; Cloth

Matthew Graham's first book of poetry, *New World Architecture*, fulfills the implied promise of its title. In poems that are restrained and elegiac he renders what we are as a people.

No, it's from out here that you see that line of land,
Shot through with the Coleman lanterns
Of surf casters and campers,
For what it really is.
It's where you came from.

("Night Surfing Off Cape Memory")

From our beginnings as a New World to what we have become is a history which we must honestly claim. Matthew Graham is a poet who has chosen to do that with a courage which earns for him a position of trust. Each poem demands fearlessness from the reader:

I think I was never told the true limits
 Of all this endlessness —
 The tracks that come to a point, finally,

("Beyond The Heartland")

He holds steady and tells us to look, through the incidents of his own life and those of others, at where we are.

But spring comes back with its whole subdivision
 Of promise, and I wonder how other men
 Wade through their lives
 Along the frontiers of their patios,
 Here in Poco Paraiso.
 How far the sons have come
 From their father's farms.

We are responsible for a history which we did not make but by whose conditions we are constituted. It is the tragic in its true sense which we are being asked to acknowledge. We are the inheritors of consequence.

What is history, if not a chilled thought
 Brought suddenly alive
 By the narrow misses our vision
 Allows? Always, what we
 Do not at first remember returns,

("To The Confederate Women Of Baltimore")

Memory and imagination are one and the same act when we reclaim a past that is as little and as well known as the future. We must go back to our own cultural heap to find even partial understanding.

But memory returns the way I imagine
 That woman returned to the assured architecture
 Of her husband's arms
 And began again that dance
 On the edge of love —
 A formal occasion.

("Chicago")

This is great and good poetry. It is patient and rigorously honest. By the end of this astringent book it is apparent that we have been led through purification