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The Rocking Chair

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The Rocking Chair. By Bradley J. Fest. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Blue Sketch Press, 2015. \$19.99 (pa.)

Classified as a "long poem," *The Rocking Chair* blurs genre, weaving an intertextual tapestry across sections, essayistic vignettes, poems, endnotes, and footnotes, and footnotes to footnotes, and mashes a variety of forms held together by rhythmical prose, accentual and blank verse, as well as fragmented free verse reminiscent of William Carlos Williams. The poem's content reaches often and expansively, shifting from personal narrative, classics, baseball, to philosophy, politics, pop-culture, sci-fi, western, geology, mathematics, and academic double-speak, sometimes in the span of a single sequence.

The poem is organized in the form of an outline that is interrupted by preludes, interludes, and appendices. After five staggering pages of notes and poems-as-annotations, "[First Interlude/Apologia" offers the reader an apology for its "grandiosity and grandiloquence" and postulates a defense for its premise, stating "To even begin to approach my task I felt it necessary to go for the throat (of existence) immediately and then look around, get my bearings, see where I was." The writer's gesture to use parentheses around the implicit boundlessness of "existence" illustrates *The Rocking Chair*'s apparent task to contain all of reality within its pages. In addition, the word's proximity to "throat" and "immediately" underscores the imminent threat of existence's redaction. Tension rises as the sequence actuates via a theoretical act of violence.

The speaker's doomed struggle for orientation in the face of death hangs over the collection. Allusions blanket the text, referencing music by Sigur Rós ("an *Agætis byrjun* of years, of eons ..."), *Katamari Damacy* (a cult hit video game in which a player rolls the universe into a ball), modern and classic philosophers (from Plotinus to Nietzsche), and numerous canonical poets including Elizabeth Bishop ("That filling station / pride of souring / at the prostitute's side"). Yet, Fest works to mediate the carpet-bomb of citations by shifting registers in diction as "... kids go[ing] apeshif" in "If the Marianas Trench Were a Gathering of Sound," or by placing a well-timed joke "Finally! The shift had occurred!" to begin " (15) Symphony of the Great Transnational."

While annotations across a book-length outline of a poem might deter even the most intrepid reader, in the end, Fest's debut is heartfelt, entertaining, and laugh-out-loud funny. The overflow of scholarly detritus recreates the experience of the poem's speaker, who quickly becomes lost and hyperaware of his dislocation, grasping for light and begging for creation of the "hyperarchive." Fest references the hyperarchive throughout *The Rocking Chair*, with one footnote containing a facsimile of the poet's hard drive; the hyperarchive appears to be an invention to tame, preserve, and organize culture's excess, but evades easy definition. The form of the book draws attention to the physicality of its reading experience, necessitating full immersion into the text, as one sifts through each annotation and anecdote hoping to uncover a pattern of meaning.

Reading Fest will bring to mind poets such as Ander Monson, Albert Goldbarth, as well as Gregory Pardlo's academic satire. At last, *The Rocking Chair* can only speak for itself.

--Mike Good

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