

FARRAH FIELD

The Art of Loud Subtlety: On Megan Kaminski's *Desiring Map*

Desiring Map, by Megan Kaminski. Atlanta, Georgia: Coconut Books, 2012.

Megan Kaminski's *Desiring Map* consists of four sections, each containing one long piece or a set of longer pieces. Together, these parts build into a powerful evocation of landscape both real and imaginary as the poems enact landscapes in their brevity on the page. Kaminski's skill at mastering space with language is powerful and rare.

The poems of *Desiring Map* sit cupped on the page. They are mostly unpunctuated list-like accumulations, groomed by a marshaled subtlety. On each page, the poems are short, not burdened by any overdoing. There is an inviting thickness to them, sort of like Faulkner on a diet. Her poems are subtle, but they read loudly; I couldn't help but hear them.

Sugar drenched wreckage sweeter than beets
lose track of central standard time
dividends exchange waged cost plus half
bring us things from other places

The mysteriousness of wreckage followed by a disconnection from time stacked upon a mention of money followed by a command—that I, by the way, want to read as bring me boots of Spanish leather—all of this is assembled one on top of the other in woven understatements. There's never really an explanation of who anybody is or what wages, yet the answers don't fully matter in Kaminski's poetry, where the rhythm weighs down "sugar" and "beets" making them a kind of landscape—of sound, of memory, of imagination. Even though her lines are ambiguously corralled, a political undertone comes to mind with heavy words like *dividends* and *wages*. There's a combination of loss and anger, I guess one could call that rage, and the mention of *sugar*

along with *wreckage* connotes something being covered up, something having gone horribly all the while being preserved.

Her ingenuity makes her poems somewhat soft that you could miss something really important if you didn't stop to feel it. They are not over-run with any sort of authorial personality, the kind that desperately and obviously wants to entangle a reader into a process. Kaminski's very thick process has already been worked out and the ideas are consolidated in a subtle finesse, albeit sometimes too embodied and too constrained.

Regardless, she maneuvers within landscape, memory, and imagination with very little pronoun usage. The he, she, we, and even I, is never a person one could point to, but neither is the landscape.

Blueprints for this decade and the next
render town into plain plain into town
coaxing ladies to squint and order bolts of fabric

There is a kind of guarded distancing in what people do in Kaminski's poems: squinting, sleeping, sharpening knives. Like Vestal virgins who protected the rituals of Rome by cloistering themselves, the actions in the poems mix trust with discomfort. I found myself somehow relieved that within these poems no one is really anyone and anyone is everyone. Occasionally, the feeling is rural and private and at other times populated and flowing. In some way, it is selfless not to have a poetic "I" telling such and such or acting and being acted upon.

There is very little out and out revealing in *Desiring Map* in general; the book moves more like a gentle sewing. So somehow the people and the authorship, poem writing, become the landscape. The self is entwined in the memory of the ocean or of plains, the ocean is entwined in nature, and nature is entwined in contemplation, and all circle the fire pit of poetry. Unspecified people and places are a great poetic undertaking. The map is never quite drawn out and the references to the sea—as though it were some weird Florida, a place with a bay lodged in a memory or dream—counteract the hot summer in the plains. No map but desire—that's the overall pull of the book, being in one place while thinking and remembering another.

"Carry Catastrophe," the strongest section, retains the book's features while being a breakaway and by far Kaminski's riskiest endeavor. She creates a world in which nature is both real and made, "dial moon on extension five." Even the moon, so faraway, can be reached through the intimacy of the telephone. The entire section is grounded in language both near and far, of nature but not without

imagination. A hidden drama between the real and man-made, "roof-tops and horizons bend spoons carry us," shows the tug between a nature that nurtures and a nature that destroys.

This dynamic boldly springs forth in the images and imperative statements Kaminski stacks on top of one another. Although the images and statements closely abut one another, they do not bury the tension between the words that tell a landscape how to behave and the words of a landscape speaking for itself. Interspersed throughout the section are shorter poems that begin with the repetitive declaration of "Here I // am." Serving as a combination of direct narrator and poetic marker, the "I" waves to the reader as though it were saying here I am or here you are, both in the landscape, in the language of landscape, yet beyond it, as if just beside the reader. While most of the book does not have this sort of direct assistance, the "here I am" repeats are welcoming and engaging, yet still with a feathered softness carried throughout the rest of the book.

If I were a student, I'd look forward to a class that offered Megan Kaminski's book in its reading list, presenting many generous and successful ways of building a book out of long pieces. Sturdily structured, *Desiring Map* has an exploratory quality that is just as open as it is contained. Regarding her publisher, Coconut Books, *Desiring Map* is quite different than many previous Coconut authors. Its quiet cadence and formal allusiveness make a striking contrast to Gina Myers and Angela Veronica Wong, for example, but there is something important here to be said about publishers who support a wide range of poetry as opposed to publishing the same sort of book that fits the same sort of aesthetic year after year. I look forward to reading more work by Megan Kaminski. In the meantime, what will Coconut Books stumble upon next? I am anxious to know.