Sunni Brown Wilkinson. *The Marriage of the Moon and the Field.* New York: Black Lawrence Press, 2019. 65 pp. Paper: $16.95. ISBN: 978-1625570048.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Cranford Garcia

"To speak to Moses, God / put a stone in his mouth, put on / a sackcloth of verbs (*want*, *need*), / cleared his throat. Cried out" (3). Sunni Brown Wilkinson this way begins her collection *The Marriage of the Moon and the Field*, effectively highlighting two threads that run throughout it: the impetus of desire for human connection and for joining two seemingly disparate worlds. In this aforementioned image, she places God in that space of desire, a lovely reversal and correlative to prayer; our desire to connect with deity is matched by God's equal (if not stronger) desire to connect with us, to be understood.

She follows through with these images of desire, depicting the

> way the ghost enters—
> humbly—the brittle hardware
> of our bodies, or hidden fires hum
> in all the wires of the house [. . .]
> That's why we kiss
> with cracked and speechless mouths.
> That's why the bush burned. (3)

Desire permeates the experience of the Holy Ghost, of love and sexuality, and of revelation in a physical way, implying that the spiritual and physical are unnecessary distinctions. This idea of desire-as-prayer/ordinance recurs throughout later poems. It emerges in the cigarette smoke of her father, who is killing time in Vietnam, likened to the prayers of his relatives:

> We're all heartsick
> sometimes: strangers in the architecture
> and burning incense at the temples,
> the names of ancestors in calligraphies of smoke
> we can't read. (4)

Then later in several other poems, it appears with Kelly O'Brien, local drunk, bearing awkward testimony "in the robes of heaven, our best sermon, / the bread we taste / before our mouths tear it to pieces" as well as with a lady balloonist who listens to the sounds of living hundreds of feet below, which she compares to "sacraments" she "ate and ate": "It was a new faith: / hearing what I couldn't see / and believing what I only heard" (21–22). In another poem, Wilkinson depicts the desire of "a dryer so full of want it burst / into flames, burned the whole house down," evoking the burning bush, symbol of revelation (25). And near the end, she clinches this concept together by observing deer;

> the moon above them
> is a hole in the sky. If you reach high enough,
> you can put your hand through,
> find a hand on the other side. (53)

By reaching through, one attains physical contact with the "other world" we seek in the sky.

These two worlds "married" together are not merely that of humankind seeking deity but an erasing of dichotomies. One of the epigraphs to the collection, "This world is the other world," epitomizes what Wilkinson's poems accomplish, reinforcing the title of the collection; she marries "the moon and the field," evoking the creation mythology of the masculine/feminine dichotomy, yet also fills her collection with images of thresholds and the world of the living and the dead coexisting in the same place. In "Two Sides of the Same," she juxtaposes thoughts of Crazy Horse awaking in the world of the dead with fruit flies that linger for days, then depicts this joining of sky and earth in a way that merges masculine and feminine images:

> In the Moon of Making Fat,
> the elderberries swelled and the colts ate a world
> of grass. When the moon rose, the milk of it spilled
> onto this world's field, and the next world's pines. (12)

Crazy Horse, as Native American seer, "could see both without closing his eyes" (12). Despite the stereotype, the effect of her trope is to assert that the dichotomy of separate worlds is illusory, but it takes a visionary to see it. This is brought home as the speaker walks through the dust of sheet rock in her home, leaving footprints "all over the house, like evidence of guests we live with and don't see." The title of the poem itself elides the word "coin," implying that the two worlds described in the body are so close that the distinction is negligible.

She continues this erasing of dichotomies in "Approaching the Threshold" as she describes the bodies of murdered women being brought back to the world of the living, piece by piece, as the medical examiner bathes each piece in a solution that slowly reveals previously undetectable scars or wounds, effectively retelling their story. But rather than a clinical portrayal, this doctor is Orpheus, who has successfully brought Eurydice back from the dead:

> On the stereo, he plays ballads, love songs,
> woos and comforts dead women in a den
>
> of puce liquids and glycerin.
> [. . .] He carries them to the bath
> the way a man carries his bride
>
> over the threshold. (9)

Because this poem follows on the heels of "Girls of the Underworld," the mythological implications are more apparent. The end of the poem seems to imply a resurrection of sorts, that the women are brought "back to the night it happened: / she waited for the green bus / to take her to work in *maquiladora* [. . .] The green bus / the edge of night / and all the women / stepping on" like Charon's barge (11).

Interestingly, this repeated erasure of distinction between the world of the living and the dead conveys a uniquely Mormon belief, that this physical world literally *is* where spirits reside. The world of the living and the dead are not at all separate. It is a concept articulated by Joseph

Smith in Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter."

One of the most interesting stylistic features of Wilkinson's work is her frequent use of sudden transitions and cyclical imagery; she often switches gears in her poems, jumping from one image to another within a line, then returning back to a previous image. This requires the reader to slow down and try to reconcile the disparate images—to turn us into "seers" who can see both worlds at once, like Crazy Horse. In "Concertato," she moves from the image of canning tomatoes to finches outside the window to a neighbor waving, then repeats the cycle:

> Bottled, each tomato presses its face
> against the glass, curious and childlike,
> like a heart thumping in wonder,
>
> like the soft knock at the door. Open it
> and there is a dead finch
> yellow at the heart and one feather on the glass.
> Pick it up. Open your hands and Gene waves hello,
> pitches hard, letting an invisible baseball go. (42)

In "Trade," her thoughts jump quickly:

> I lost a child once. Too early to know
> boy or girl.
>   Spotting.
> The woman's breasts are brush-
>   stroked circles, the man reaches
> for her. I told my dad he could live with us
>   when he's old and wants to die
> picking corn or weeding tomatoes. (47)

These sudden moves without transition in effect provide a sense that all things are happening at once, as if attempting to overcome the

spatiotemporal limitations of the written word. It reminds us that time is not linear, that there is no before or after, that those, too, are an illusory dichotomy.

Notwithstanding Wilkinson's skill and adeptness with language, there are moments when the lyricism falls short of its potential, particularly with the poems evoking domesticity. Though she seems to initiate a defense of the subject—"And for all the art about Paris or the sea, why not more about laundry?" (26)— the few poems within the collection that center on this subject seem tangential to the collection's prominent themes of desire and "marriage" of disparate worlds. A few of them read as workshop exercises ("Culinary Arts," "My Possible Pasts,"), while others are inventive and thought-provoking ("My Son Says He Has an Owl Inside of Him," "Butter on the Bread") but only marginally relevant. Yet all of these are poems still worth savoring and unpacking. Her language is lovely and fresh, often enlivening clichéd tropes like falling leaves—"The leaves' infectious lecture about dying / is spreading wild across town" (29).

Combined together, Wilkinson's techniques and imagery convey a central moving idea: that all it takes to erase perceived distances is desire; that desire is a sacred offering, that "even the ram / became a bright fire" (30). One is reminded of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, both through the title and through both collections' entwined threads of dichotomies and desire, prompting a closer look at Blake's comments on the subject: "Those who restrain Desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or Reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling. And being restrained, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of Desire."[1] Like Blake, Wilkinson is attempting to redeem desire from its

1. William Blake, "The Voice of the Devil," in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), available at www.bartleby.com/235/253.html.

association with sin, purifying it, making it itself a redemptive force. Her collection is not merely an assortment of nice poems but a stunning theological statement.

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Lessons in Scriptural Origami

James Goldberg. *Remember the Revolution: Mormon Essays and Stories.* Self-published, 2019. 161 pp. Paper: $12.95. ISBN: 978-1695244900.

James Goldberg. *The First Five-Dozen Tales of Razia Shah: and Other Stories.* Self-published, 2019. 148 pp. Paper: $12.95. ISBN: 978-1695025226.[1]

Reviewed by Chad Curtis

I first discovered James Goldberg when a friend from my mission shared a blog post from the *Mormon Midrashim* entitled "Explanation, Justification, Sanctification." In it, the author shares some profound theology with his ten-year-old daughter in a way that she could readily understand through the genre of children's post-fighting storytelling:

1. All citations in this review refer to the location number from the e-book editions.