Carla Funk, *Gloryland*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2016. Pp. 117 Softcover, $17.00.

The place of faith in the contemporary world is perhaps the least cool subject on the planet, and in its uncoolness, one of the most urgent, desperately in need of discussion beyond demagoguery or cant, where its real human struggle and connections and overlaps between faiths and peace and compassion can find resonance. Carla Funk's new book, *Gloryland*, is full of faith-based po-

etry in the most effulgent sense of the word. These poems are not po-faced with a firm knowledge of the right spiritual path, nor are they hollowly righteous. In her new book, Funk offers neither advice nor false redemption, but rather something akin to Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism – the condition in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" – filtered through revelation. Recently, Miriam Toews' essay, "Peace Shall Destroy Many," explored how some communities run on secrecy and pain, and about how the silencing shame of knowing about those violences can shape a self-annihilating future. While *Gloryland* has a different view of gendered violence, Funk's childhood view of "God's hand as a javelin's thrower's, / elite, Olympic, trained on me, his bulls-eye" dovetails with Toews' account, reminding readers that the primary condition of having a body is that it makes every dream of glory a sacrifice.

And that paradox is the one of great pleasures of Funk's *Gloryland*. Who are we if we can't talk about the end of the world, and about how our bodies simultaneously yearn towards and struggle against that end? Funk works with that fundamental contradiction as the bedrock (or perhaps the cloud ceiling) of our existence, and this book parses the ways that transcendence is possible – just possible, but not easy. I thought, as I read *Gloryland*, of Gerard Manley Hopkins and haeccitas: the "thisness" that proposes God's grandeur "like shining from shook foil; it gathers to a greatness." Funk plumbs some of the difficulty of that vision, including a Hopkinsian grief about how to live well with difference, and a marked fascination with how, as Hopkins writes, "the bent/ World broods with ah! bright wings." The questing speaker of *Gloryland* does not fear the bend in the world, but rather considers its cruel beauty with a phenomenological eye.

The more eschatological *Gloryland* gets, the more ground Funk gains poetically. Moving backwards and forwards between youth and age is a standard practice in lyric poetry; it takes a while to get these joints moving in Funk's book and to establish the conversation between memory and the present. The first section, "Inheritance," is perhaps the most conventional part of the book, and certainly appealing enough in its depictions of a thinking girlhood in a small town. But in the second section, "Fallow or Feast," Funk's bartered glory tightens its death-grip on the narrative of a life lived, and the book begins its real work of complicating deliverance as a process and as a way of being in the physical world.

Gloryland hits its stride when it offers the grit of lived contradiction: the itch of sex and sin, the dirt, the class conflicts in a

small town. The paternal elegy at the end of "Fallow or Feast" marks not only a turn to adulthood but also to something more existentially dangerous in the following section, "Breviary." Desiring "the Prophet's portion" in "Crossing the Wires," and the "whistling/ in the dark" in "Song of the Laughingstock," Funk's speaker urges, "Come score my mind / come make it worthy of the fire" and the book leaps towards a toughened spirit of the age: a bold and sometimes genuinely cranky wish for the quotidian future, whatever it may hold. Because as revelatory as *Gloryland* is, Funk is consciously working with the conundrum that spiritual striving is a contradiction in terms while knowing that a welcome hard labour lies between the speaker and glory.

The back cover blurb of *Gloryland* notes that the book "illuminates the small and marvellous marginalia of the earth" and "offers poems for the apocalyptic age." Craig Koester – among other scholars – notes that apocalypse does not mean disaster and annihilation but rather disclosure: a warning that the brutal world will call us worthless, an extreme cautionary tale that the beast of capitalism is a machine of annihilation, and that a life lived without integrity is a crisis of the first order. With Koester's caveat in mind, we could paraphrase Auden to say that about suffering they were never wrong, the ancient Hebraic scholars, but that leaves us with the perennial problem of how to live in that brutal world. "With every dog, I'm learning how to die," writes Funk in the poem "Mirror Test," probing the quotidian for its guiding principles in forging integrity.

This is what passes as a comforting read for me these days. Presenting apocalypse wrung through revelation, *Gloryland* isn't easy. And for the work it proposes to do, it had better not be.

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