

and so on. “Who Can Outlast the Weather?” asks the title of one poem. In some ways, the implied answer of this collection is “no one,” as we are all shown to be finite, embodied and fragile. And yet another way to read the full collection is to focus on the poetry’s celebration of the ideas, stories, and artistic mysteries that endure as seasons change. “the stories are all shifting, negotiations breaking off,” he writes, only to add: “I can sleep in this burning house.”

Maxwell Kennel
University of Toronto

Jeff Gundy, *Wind Farm: Landscape with Stories and Towers*. Cincinnati: Dos Madres, 2022. Pp. 172.
Softcover, \$22 US.

In his latest book, *Wind Farm: Landscape with Stories and Towers*, Jeff Gundy describes a guitar he inherited as “always ready to make any sound I can shape with my two hands my restless worried mind.” Some of that sound has spilled delightfully onto these “stories and towers.” In *Wind Farm*, “Towers” refers directly to the massive wind turbines dotting the landscape and interrupting the horizon across the Illinois farmland Gundy grew up on, but the stories in the collection are often just as monumental. His contemplative and circumspect tour of this landscape is both troubling and beautiful, as confrontation with the environmental and social cost of technological progress, especially industrial agriculture, is met with the wit, humour, and warmth of remembering days less complicated by the concerns of adulthood. But this is not escapism, or worse, that toxic impulse of nostalgia. Gundy’s signature attention to both the obvious and peculiar details of the material worlds in which he was raised invite us to reflect on the forces that shape us into who we are, even forces as intangible and fleeting as the wind.

Wind Farm is not an easy book to place in terms of genre. Non-fiction, yes. Creative non-fiction, probably. In the cover matter Elizabeth Dodd calls it a “lyric memoir, prose-poem meditation,” and these descriptors work well. Like Julia Spicher Kasdorf’s *Shale Play*, it’s a multimodal text, pairing photos and words and inviting us to consider our relationship to the environment and each other. Notably, Gundy complements his own work alongside photos and text from other sources—from epigraphs invoking William Stafford, Eliza Farnham, and Sofia Samatar to photographs gleaned from friends, family, and the 1970 Flanagan High School Syllabus—which contribute to the rich conversation he nurtures. The book is a

collection of thirty-five short essays, most of them only a few pages long, including topics like high school football, old girlfriends, dealing with chicken manure, and the mysterious Indigenous burial mounds scattered through the American Midwest. The essays are told and connected through the perspective of “the wind farmer,” an uneasy honorific Gundy assigns himself as a central conceit. The prose is marked by his comfortable, probing style; at times he revises his thoughts mid-sentence, as when he points out “The beauty of wind turbines is awkward and pragmatic, like the great blue heron’s—or, better, the great egret, which is snowy white as the towers.” This intimate style pulls readers close to Gundy’s own processing, and develops a sense of candid experience. His penchant for evocative imagery and lyric language is highly effective as well. Even as his attachment to the landscapes of his youth is clear, for example, at one point he admits a longing for “some place less monochrome and windswept, some place more like a cradle and less like a table that might just let you to be swept right off the edge.”

One of the most compelling threads in the book is the problematic relationship between industrial agriculture and rural small-town life. “The bigger the machines, the fewer farmers it takes to run them,” Gundy writes in “Of the Wind Farmer’s Youth: With No Robot.” He expands on this theme later, in an essay called “The Wind Farm Does Not Require a Farmer”:

The wind farmer has no responsibility for maintenance or oversight, no duties or obligations, no investment except nostalgia, sentiment, and an obscure sense of possible sublimity, interlaced with layers of disaffection, boredom, suspicion, impatience, with faint undertones of rage and grief that he believes ought to be stronger. His title, like his duties, are entirely imaginary.

A similar blend of wit and dead-serious observation emerges again in an essay reflecting on public resistance to wind farms, which juxtaposes data aggregated by the Sierra Club and federal government with “a somewhat more subjective discourse on the subject” by one Donald J. Trump. But even in this droll moment Gundy helps us see how the “advantages and challenges” of alternative energy reflect questions of power both electrical and political.

Gundy also reflects on the role folk music and rock and roll played in his formation as an artist, from hearing “House of the Rising Sun” on radio in “the chaste upstairs bedroom,” to his relationship with different guitars he’s owned, to watching “mostly unknown rock bands” at a dance hall in Pontiac. In one scene he describes “plodding through [Dylan’s] early hits on my first terrible guitar, slowly learning the changes and building the necessary

calluses.” Given the paragraph opens with a gentle but disconnected interaction with his father about the quality of Dylan’s musicianship, the scene functions as a subtle but provocative metaphor for what it means to learn the changes and grow the calluses required to mature into adulthood.

Essays like “Of the Wind Farmer’s Youth: I Hear the Drumming” offer snapshots and meditations on adolescent life at the intersections of Mennonite and popular American culture, especially regarding social unrest and the Vietnam War. Like those focused on unquestioned environmental impact, these essays consider some consequences of quiet-in-the-land theopraxis. Gundy notes of Mennonites that his “people slid through the net of American violence like fish too small for the webbing, mostly neither killers nor killed. They lived as I live on stolen land, oblivious, not grateful, rinsing the rare arrowheads clean and displaying them under glass.” Gundy also explores the diminishing Mennonite presence in Midwestern small towns, describing closed churches and depopulated farmsteads: “as I found out, as most of us found out,” he writes, “it was not so hard to leave the home place.” If nurturing strong relationships is a core Mennonite priority, we must wonder about the relationship between land, neighbour, and each other that leads to the sparseness and depopulation he describes.

There is much to admire in *Wind Farm*, but perhaps the most important is the gift of attention and consequent perception to the process of formation: both how we form and are formed by our time on this increasingly dusty and wind-driven earth. Gundy writes “The wind farmer wishes he could write a large, important, terrifying book . . . [with] hundreds of earnest, grave, thoroughly researched pages about the collapse of prairie cultures and ecosystems,” but that, of course, is a book for a scientist to write, and probably for other scientists to read. I’m not convinced that’s the book we need, in any case. Gundy is a poet at heart, thankfully, and I would rather read the book he wrote instead.

Kyle Gerber
University of Waterloo