

really, but leave you with a closet full of empty pants,” which is the kind of line you have to read aloud to everyone within earshot. In this unique mode, Bradley builds and undoes, highlights and unpacks, recognizing and redoing cultural knowledge and its strange relationships. *You Don't Know What You Don't Know* is a book of poems that challenges and changes our carefully constructed world, and we leave knowing we'll “have to come back here and do this all once more.”

—Callista Buchen, *University of Kansas*

**Citrus County** by John Brandon. San Francisco: McSweeney's Rectangulars, 2010. 215 pages. \$22, cloth.

In his first novel, the hard-boiled, heartbreaking *Arkansas*, John Brandon wrote with equal parts cynicism and hope about two twenty-somethings shrugging the drudgery of work to run drugs through the trailer courts, failing towns, and haphazardly run state parks of Arkansas's nether regions. Where his debut earned comparisons to the work of Tom Drury and Denis Johnson, it's tempting to liken Brandon's second novel, *Citrus County*, to Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, on the grounds that each explores the relationship between a character's circumstances and life choices.

Like Anderson's characters, whose lives become warped by ideas too powerful to be realized, John Brandon's three heroes—riling adolescents Toby and Shelby and their fatalistic geography teacher, Mr. Hibma—carry secret longings. Mr. Hibma incubates his hatred of an elderly English teacher who confounds his subversive teaching methods by hanging inspirational posters in her room and refusing to teach the unwholesome literature of Shirley Jackson and Edgar Allan Poe to her students. Shelby e-mails her aunt living in Iceland in the hopes that she'll be invited overseas for an extended vacation. We follow Toby into the woods and learn of his distaste for the “pale fascinations of his classmates—

music, drugs, cutting themselves, sex”; instead of clichéd rebellion, Toby's compulsion finds substance in a musty bunker on the edge of his Uncle Neil's property. The narrative gathers momentum while Brandon sketches these inner conflicts; after thirty pages, the patch of swampy, forested land perennially passed on by industry and the hurricanes that smash Florida's coastlines explodes in media frenzy as Toby carries off Shelby's younger sister Kaley.

The novel ventures close to the crime-story territory of *Arkansas*, but Brandon avoids sensationalism by drawing tight lines between and around the characters while heaping in healthy doses of young love, the ennui of a couple of hapless FBI agents, Toby's deranged uncle's dour existentialism, and junior high basketball to thicken the themes of longing and rebellion. Brandon's style rests on scenes almost transparently observed, at once striking and elusive, as compelling for their omissions as for the material Brandon renders. In many respects, the novel's driving force is this power of secrecy. It is Toby's belief that the bunker has a conscious purpose which compels him to take Kaley, and then to track the progress of the countywide search thereafter in the hopes that his actions will somehow have transformed him, given him power over others that his ordinary life refuses him. Like Toby, Shelby and Mr. Hibma harbor their own hope that their plans will lead to private satisfaction.

At a glance, *Citrus County* resembles a young adult novel in its concern for the ins and outs of young love and a few feints toward redemption, but at the heart of the novel lies a faithful exploration of the consequences that often follow serious acts of rebellion. The resulting novel revels as much as its characters in confounding convention.

—Patrick Faller, *West Virginia University*

**Bloom** by Simmons B. Buntin. Cliffs of Moher, Ireland: Salmon Poetry, 2010. 98 pages. \$19.95, paper.

Simmons B. Buntin's second collection of poems masterfully weaves the landscape and plant life of the American Southwest into a personal language. The taxonomies readers encounter here possess none of the Linnaean tendencies toward destruction (although Buntin knows that language) but make us believe that redemption through naming is possible. Even the glossary Buntin provides at the end of the book borders on the mytho-poetic. Take for example his definition of "Creosote": "A long-lived and airy shrub native to the Sonoran desert with small, waxy yellow-green leaves. The creosote releases a distinct aroma before rainstorms that is often referred to as 'the smell of the desert.'" Buntin knows his place because it is his place, and the plants here take on a haunting totemic quality.

Bloom is complex, melding personal tragedy and naturalistic archetypes. Take the final poem, "Inflorescence," an eight-part mini-epic paralleling the recovery of the poet's daughter after a "plunge through the plate window" at a friend's house with the toppling death of an agave on the poet's property. The girl in the poem does not die. She slowly recovers from her wounds. The agave does, but not before disseminating its tubular suckers, and passing itself on in the inflorescence of the poem's title. Buntin is not sentimental; however, the metaphorical death in "Inflorescence" is the death of the sentimental father.

As a consequence of this sublime disillusionment, Buntin's naturalism takes a problematic turn in such poems as "In May I Consider My Websites," "Drawing," and "Amazon.com." In "In May . . ." the "white-winged dove at the feeder" and "the Mexican birds of paradise" the poet imagines are not pastoral antidotes to digital industry but the avian origin of digital logic. "Amazon.com" conflates digital marketing with nature, ending with the line "the air burning with recommendations." Digital culture cannot be construed as "unnatural," says Buntin in "Drawing," nor can any energy that bridges

collective synapses, regardless of the unsavory ends it seeks. A lesser poet would endorse nostalgia, sequestering the organic from the inorganic, while Buntin sees

the smudge of atomic shadows—  
the two anti-shadows  
of sitting lovers who, when  
the bomb blossomed  
overhead, could not comprehend  
the unbearable light . . . .

Is the light "pouring over everything and nothing, / like that last terrible night in Eden" bearable? Can we make disillusionment mean something by naming it? This unflinching poetry suggests that we have a chance.

—John Freeman, *Oakland University*

*Extraordinary Renditions* by Andrew Ervin. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2010. 186 pages. \$14.95, paper.

It's the most desperate, painful and challenging moments of a person's life that demand story; the moments and decisions from which futures pivot. This is exactly what Andrew Ervin has captured in his debut, *Extraordinary Renditions*, a novel told in three intersecting stories, each marking a dramatic turning point for the respective protagonists. Following a famous composer, a frustrated American soldier, and a young violinist, this novel-in-stories is told with rare patience, thoughtful energy, and a surprising unity of principles and politics that can only be described as harmony.

It should be no surprise that Ervin is an accomplished literary critic. His decision-making as an author is exceedingly mature, particularly in his pacing, as he smoothly weaves these separate stories into a single narrative of courage and transformation and the different shapes they take. He is keenly aware of his form and its challenges, and he guides us seamlessly to the heart of each story and the novel as a whole: how one fights oppressive and unjust forces.