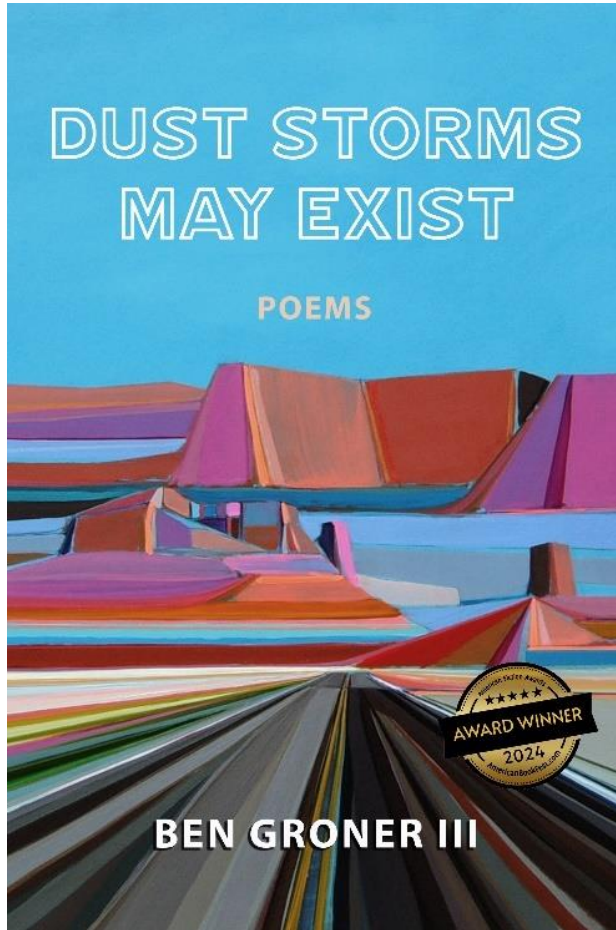


Book Review

Groner, Ben III. *Dust Storms May Exist*. Madville Publishing, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-956440-85-0 (paperback). 106 pages, \$19.95.



Reviewed by Cristina Rascón

“One could make the case that more than / anything else, this country is a road,” shares Ben Groner III in his poem “When a Country Is a Metaphor.” Winner of the 2024 American Fiction Award for Religious Poetry, Groner’s book, *Dust Storms May Exist*, unravels a 10,000-mile road trip—primarily through the southern states of the “Untied States,” as he notes in a clever wordplay that reappears throughout the book. The poems also travel beyond the U.S., venturing into Chile, Argentina, and the Netherlands. As readers, we accompany Groner on a journey of poetry,

landscapes, and fleeting moments—poem by poem, city by city—as if each verse were glimpsed through a car window.

After reading *Dust Storms May Exist*, I came to believe that, more than anything else, this book is a road. In the aforementioned poem, Groner writes, “Even my own past, am as malleable / as a ridgeline curve, able to divert course.” I felt this deeply—not only as an observer of the author’s journey, but as a traveler along my own life path.

Groner’s language and sensitivity guide us not only through a country, but also through an unknown way back home. Ithaca comes to mind when he speaks of “a place called childhood” in the poem “Corpus Christi”—an exploration of time, memory, and origin. Childhood becomes a location where he once “idled and grew / and imagined futures.” He speaks of time travel, particularly in the context of searching for a connection with his late father. Returning home, for Groner, may mean arriving at a place, summoning a memory, or hearing a father’s voice on an old recording.

The book is divided into five parts. The first consists of a single poem, “The Window.” The second introduces the road trip through the “Untied States.” The third follows his travels through South America. The fourth explores new landscapes—and, perhaps, new languages. The fifth brings the journey full circle: an ending that feels like a new beginning. As the epigraph by William Least Heat-Moon states, “Following a circle would give a purpose—to come around again—where taking a straight line would not... But how to begin a beginning?” Groner’s circle concludes with the line: “It has taken me so long to be inside of my own life.”

One of the most compelling poems in the collection is “Additional Questions for the Canyon.” If this book is a road, this poem feels like the moment the car stops and time halts. We hear the voice of a canyon, ancient and enduring:

Do you remember everyone who’s ever descended into your depths?
You’d be surprised how much even one soul weighs. I forget nothing.
What about those who merely photographed you from your edges?
Most are mist to me, though a few cross my mind every century or so.
What’s it like in the heat of the summer sun?
A surrender. A shedding of inhibition. An opening of self.

Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, New Mexico, Kentucky, South Carolina, Nebraska, South Dakota, Indiana, and more—these are the landscapes of Groner’s journey. In these places, his untied state of being opens and surrenders. Thought or memory alone may not be enough, nor is forgetting the solution. In his effort to reconstruct the past, Groner reveals

that the present moment becomes paramount. Past and present intermingle. In “Abandoned Fairytale,” he writes:

Everything
after tonight will be remembering
a remembering. The mind recalls
itself, recollecting what cannot
be collected again.

I imagine the voice of the canyon would agree. Join Groner’s poetic road trip, and you may find yourself attuned to your own sharp moments of presence. You might notice how your past, too, can shift course. You may discover that “home” can arise through unexpected encounters—and that any place might speak directly to you, untying the mystery of your own journey.