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defined what they meant by “lyrical”?” and also of Armantrout’s most lyrical poems to date: in *Versed* when she is handling the subject of cancer. Though essential qualities of the “lyrical” are not explicitly determined, definition remains a central consideration in Armantrout’s work, and always leads us to inquiry. Can a term like “authenticity” be defined with an utterance about its function? Can a life’s course be described if “always half / forgotten / or mis- / remembered as / our own”?—a fitting question for a poet engaged in the experiment of collective autobiography. Do we trust that a poem entitled “Human,” which starts with “a subatomic particle,” can actually tell us what either of them are? A personal form emerges from these preoccupations, and meaning can change through the poem’s procedure, which involves an “equal counter-weight of assertion and doubt.” (See Armantrout’s “Cheshire Poetics”). A commitment to this course allows for flexibility through juxtaposition, a “double-bind” of doubt and faith in the function of any concept or thing. All ideas when spoken (or written down) exist in “liminal” space, in “an illusion / of passage,” leading the poet to question everything, even words like “the” or “with.” But while she wavers on whether the phrase “the known world” can yield any perceptible meaning, her procedure admits that poetry, even when exposing overused language, does.

—Alan Felsenthal

VOYAGER. By Srikanth Reddy (University of California Press, 2011)

In his first book, *Facts for Visitors*, Srikanth Reddy presented us with the image of the poet as a wry if mellifluous tour guide to the overlapping geographies of under- and overdeveloped worlds. In his new book, *Voyager*, he becomes a reticent and compulsive Virgil, erasing and re-erasing the memoirs of Kurt Waldheim so as to produce a bleak landscape of surpassing moral obtuseness. The title refers to the pair of Voyager space probes launched by NASA in 1977 on a “Grand Tour” of the solar system; they have become, three decades later, the man-made objects that have traveled farthest from the Earth. But it also describes Waldheim, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations whose voice (recorded on a gold LP attached to the Voyager probes along with whale songs, baby talk, and “Johnny B. Goode”) was intended to serve as the interstellar introduction of our species to whom- or whatever might encounter it, millennia hence. Of course Waldheim’s sublunary voyage is more infamous: before he became, as Reddy drily puts it in Waldheim’s own words, “a spokesman for humanity . . . so to speak, the conscience of mankind,” he served as an intelligence officer for Hitler’s SS. Reddy’s book does not float in the easy irony of that fact

but instead takes Waldheim, in all of his mingled mendacity and idealism, to be the representative man of the twentieth century. The Secretary-General becomes “a formal negotiation” whose words will be carried “to a government above.” The book explores the contradiction of Waldheim’s character in three sections or “Books” and three epilogues, in which text from Waldheim’s book *In the Eye of the Storm* is continually reused and recycled. Book One is presented in a beautifully abstract propositional form while Book Two consists of prose poems in a scholarly voice that could easily double for Reddy’s own. Book Three is the longest and most challenging, written in a three-step line evocative of Dante’s *terza rima*, depicting Waldheim-Odysseus’s descent into hells of ambiguity, eventually breaking down (or up?) into white space voids evocative of Ronald Johnson’s treatment of Milton (if Johnson had been concerned with intensifying rather than lightening the “darkness visible” of *Paradise Lost*). The darkly satirical adventures of Waldheim in his diplomatic afterlife (depicted at one point negotiating “between the Democratic Republic / of Union // and the International Committee / of the Non-Aligned Movement / for Foreign Community”) are at one point juxtaposed with the Buddha’s origin story, presented in a form that mixes fable with geopolitics: “*On the Indian sub-continent, / a prince was isolated / from all knowledge // that might upset him.*” Blind where he would be most virtuous, culpable in his evasions of power, Reddy’s Waldheim is one of the most memorable and disturbingly recognizable characters to emerge in recent poetry. The book is most moving in its epilogues, in which the exact same pages of text are presented three times, unaltered save for the words that Reddy has stricken through. Out of Waldheim’s, our, Reddy’s obsessive repetitions, therefore, a political narrative tentatively emerges that echoes Freud’s “Where the id was, the ego shall be”: “Yet I am not without hope,” “citizens,” “I am a,” “believer in,” “silent,” “prayers,” “relinquished.”

—Joshua Corey

GREENSWARD. By Cole Swensen. (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010)

Cole Swensen’s *Greensward* is set in “18th century England; the scene is the garden of a manor house.” The reader may ask what county? what house? what year? but, unanswered, journeys headlong into a thrillingly unnamed, untitled, possibly never-built territory, one ruled by this remarkable new book’s central tenet—namely, though finite definition might elude us, ambiguity keeps us present. Framed by 18th century garden design, calm and determined, *Greensward* questions the boundaries between