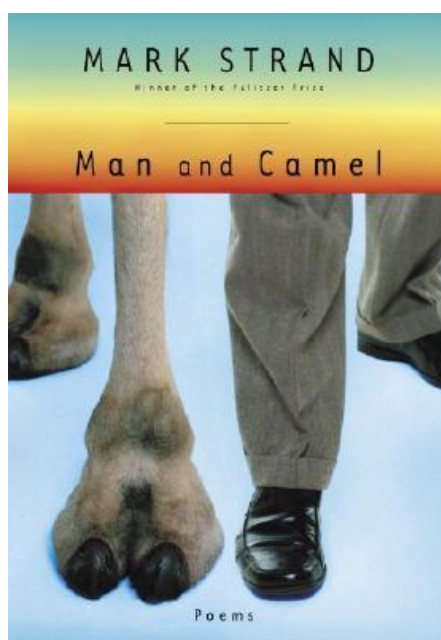




Man and Camel

Mark Strand

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This eleventh collection by Mark Strand is a toast to life's transience and abiding beauty. He begins with a group of light but haunting fables, populated by figures like the King, a tiny creature in ermine who has lost his desire to rule, and by the poet's own alter ego, who recounts the fetching mystery of the title poem: "I sat on the porch having a smoke / when out of the blue a man and a camel / happened by." The poet has Arctic adventures and encounters with the bearded figure of Death; in his controlled tone, he creates his bold visions and shows us, like a magician, how they vanish in a blink. Gradually, his fancies give way to powerful scenes of loss, as in "The Mirror," where the face of a beautiful woman stares past him

into a place I could only imagine . . .
as if just then I were stepping
from the depths of the mirror
into that white room, breathless and eager,
only to discover too late
that she is not there.

Man and Camel concludes with a small masterpiece of meditations crafted around the Seven Last Words of Christ. Here, this secular poet finds resonance in the bedrock of Christ's language, the actual words that have governed so many generations of thought and belief. As always with Mark Strand, the discovery of meaning in the sound of language itself is an act of faith that enlightens us and carries us beyond the bounds of the rational.

Man and Camel Details

Date : Published September 5th 2006 by Knopf
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Author : Mark Strand
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From Reader Review Man and Camel for online ebook

Rob says

I listened to an interview of Mark Strand on a CBC podcast the last time I drove to Kamloops. He seemed like a fascinating man, and the poems they read of his were terrific. They were surreal and hilarious. I ordered this book as soon as I got home, and I'm fairly happy with it. It was way too expensive for its size, and I found many of the poems to be forgettable, but there are a few gems hidden in there.

Robert Beveridge says

Mark Strand, **Man and Camel** (Knopf, 2006)

I let my review of this go too long, and it ended up going back to the library without my pulling quotes to illustrate my points, so this is going to be a very short review.

I've read a few of Strand's books before, and never really quite figured out what it is about his work that everyone goes on about. I once submitted some stuff to a magazine, and when I got a reply, they'd taken everything except one poem which they labeled as being "too personal" for their readership. (I still have no idea why, since it was a cut-up/fold-in thing that had as little of the personal about it as I could manage!) I often get that feeling while reading Strand, whether it's the forty-year-old poems in *Darker* or the more recent stuff in *Man and Camel*, and this is one of those places where I wish I still had the book in front of me to pull quotes; there's a poem about seeing a woman, and knowing her, or thinking you know her, and it seems to end about three lines before everything comes together. On the other hand, this book did bring me the closest I think I've come to figuring it out, in the long poem towards the back, where I felt at least three or four times that whatever bones Strand had fleshed out to make this poem (many of which were religious, and not a few secular) were close enough to the surface to make out their shapes, and not coincidentally that was my favorite poem here.

If you're already a fan, you're pretty much guaranteed to like what you find. If you're not yet, this is the best of Strand's books that I've read so far. ***

Craig says

Still not a huge Strand fan, I guess.

I did really like Black Sea, Mother and Son, and the first section of Poem After the Last Seven Words. Otherwise, I felt that all of the poems were "o.k."

I felt that the surrealism of the first section borrowed from or else was a paler version of "lesser" writers such as Jonathan Carroll or Neil Gaiman. Here, Mark seems to always have the same flavor of writing -- the fairy tale twists and dark turns -- but without the depth of feeling.

I enjoyed the second and third sections much more than the first.

I sound much more harsh than I intend to be. It was worth reading once - just not a book I feel I will return to any time soon.

Ana says

Lo siento, es horrible.

Philip says

this one's ok... would i give it the pulitzer? no. did it get the pulitzer? yes.* does his representation of "the sea" seem to differ with every poem? yes. does that make it more intellectual? possibly. more annoying? yes. i give it a five for cover art. and i'll say there are specific poems that are clear and enchanting. ("2002," "the rose," "2032," "mother and son") but i can't give the book overall more than a three. of course, i don't even have a clue how they choose who gets the pulitzer.

*This book did *not* win the Pulitzer. See comments below.

Jenna says

In 2008, I was in a semester-long workshop taught by Mark Strand, and it was delightful. For years, I've loved Strand's poem "The Tunnel," a bleak absurdist allegory that warns us of the consequences of our unthinking fear of the Other---or, what amounts to the same thing, our woeful inability to recognize that the Self and the Other are the same (the most fundamental of Dharmic truths, and the root of all compassion).

Still, it took me over two years to muster the resolve to read one of Strand's books in its entirety. I chose this volume because it includes "Black Sea," a light but lovely lyric that is surprisingly swollen with old-fashioned romanticism and psalmodic resonances, and which Strand recited with aplomb in Central Park last summer against an orchestral backdrop provided by the New York City Pops (the performance can be watched and re-watched to one's heart's content on YouTube).

This is overall a pretty mellow book, with some gently tickling humor that reminds me quite a bit of James Tate (but then again, all the "funny" poets currently writing in America remind me of James Tate, or of one another). To my mind, the only poem here to achieve the same heights of lyrical romanticism as "Black Sea" is "The Mirror," but you may find other gems as well.

Fernando says

It is easy to speak well of Mark Strand (Summerside , 1934) . This is an author -backed international critics and audiences , with a space reserved in all prestigious library , and has received major literary prizes , including the Pulitzer . Crowning these summits highlighting in poetry (and visiting , successful, other genres) is a letter of unquestionable quality .

However, it is not easy to admit that an author so deep heating will transform even the internal perspective and that, based on certain common places - those poems that seem written for you, those items that make up your particular obsessions , finish never considered breaking new ground in the form of lyrical self-expression .

This Canadian Poetry travels in a speech diaphanous free verse (no rhyme or meter) with a tendency to narrative (exposure scenarios) and minimalist strokes that are committed against a detailed description evocation . The language itself is simple and straightforward , ornamental resources away from wasteful and convoluted metaphors . It moves in a very clear and accessible online .

The literary epiphany that we as search and proposed that the poem expresses . Transmute the everyday - perhaps insignificant in revelation hidden inside surrealism terrain vague , of the imaginary and the esoteric. Try (achieved) break the bars that contemporary society and in the last (or maybe first) instance , our own selves , we imposed to isolate an invisible but very close Truth . A shining example is the title poem : man and camel , perfect metaphor of indecision and fear of failure in this crucial moment of our lives that we've been waiting so , only one of the many feelings suggested in this composition , because the poetry of Mark Strand is comprehensive , complete and complex .

We are faced with a book of contrasts and contrasts formal simplicity versus the plural of emotion it evokes, and the freedom and beauty of nature against the impossibility of leaving the urban (an urbanity , however , omnipresent and American frivolously , of huge skyscrapers , that has completely invaded no return) . This duality reaches its peak at the theme of love. It leads us to the fullness but also implies the possible loss of the loved - by habit and lack of conviction in holding on to it - that , ultimately , is transformed into the image of Death. Even so , at times, Death appears as a plastic , contemporary sadly , away from that which is lived classically (liberation) , which speaks in haste our new surface language , of chic , we taxi transported to " the ultimate in hotel " . Also , therefore, represents a death of authenticity . This is the backbone of the book: the bittersweet song to what we are about to lose without being aware of what we just went to look , abandoning the superfluous , at the last moment , on the edge of the storm. As proof, just enough to read one of the best poems Black Sea . With each verse, we peer into the abyss that opens under the asphalt of anxiety.

As usual in the collection , invoice book physics is impeccable. No errata . The edition is bilingual , well presented, and the translation and foreword by Damaso Lopez Garcia are very successful and have even received the advice of the author .

There are books that are a milestone in our lives. We make a fire in the same way they did Becquer and Neruda in adolescence of first love and first heartbreak . This has been the case personal road to maturity , of Man and Camel, Mark Strand. Gold will occupy a place among the greatest of my library and will be visited frequently.

Paul says

Clever never ever parable-poems. Dreams evaporate into ether and evanescence. Faint echoes of Eliot's Four Quartets. The ghost of Wallace Stevens haunts the halls of ruined mansions and "the malodorous sea" (17) of Mark Strand's Man and Camel--another animal altogether--and "that sudden paradise of sound" (30). Searching for "the silence" (39) via negativa. There's really "nothing" to it. These words work to resist well-meaning readers. They are vanishings.

Helen says

A short collection of poems that fall between the many gradations of darkness and light, using sharp,

haunting, and sometimes surreal imagery.

Smart, intense, and thought provoking.

Allison DeLauer says

collection in 3 parts, 1st part soberly whimsical - surreal - spare fairytailish, 2nd part focus on dark and longing, 3rd part a commission to accompany music - reflection on what happened after the last seven words of Christ having used the gnostic gospel of Thomas as a source

I love this - poetry just the way I like it! elegant lines with re-curring motifs and a (forgive me) maxfield parish-ish color scheme throughout the collection. Images (ice, green gold, marlble, moon, sea, stars) - look at the way he is referencing the sky - scattering of stars, strewn with stars, star-clustered sky, sound of stars. He gives scintillating endings to to boot, e.g. " to have known the fragrance of paper burning, the sound of words breathing their last", or "...and up ahead / long windlbown shadows lashed the passive ground"; each poem with an emotional core that soberly considers the big questions of the human/ infinite but leaves room for beauty, the mundane, and warmth. strong sense of form - there are poems in couplets, poems in quatraines, he inlcudes a pantoum. all very satisfying. My biggest complaint: the gawd-awful cover image of man's leg and foot next to a camel's (toes). bad designer! bad designer!

Brian says

Overall, not my cup of tea. I did like this one, though:

My Name

Once when the lawn was a golden green/ and the marbled moonlit trees rose like fresh memorials/
in the scented air, and the whole countryside pulsed/ with the chirr and murmur of insects, I lay in the grass,/ feeling the great distances open above me, and wondered/ what I would become and where I would find myself,/ and though I barely existed, I felt for an instant/ that the vast star-clustered sky was mine, and I heard/ my name as if for the first time, heard it the way/ one hears the wind or the rain, but faint and far off/ as though it belonged not to me but to the silence/ from which it had come and to which it would go.

Becky says

Wonderful. I read it on a beautiful day with the blue sky and a soft breeze.

Kristy says

I think I'll agree with the other reviewers here and say that this was not good enough to win the Pulitzer. First of all, this is definitely Old White Man Poetry - morose and indulgent, no risky language or images. They generally won't appeal to people under 40. The poems are the perfect length (can't stand poetry that's too long), but some of the ideas here are only half-formed and often cryptic. Lots of imagery of the sea, but nothing new about it.

The Good

"Conversation"

I also said

*that there is sadness in knowing that the undoing
of what has been done will never take place*

"My Name"

*and though I barely existed, I felt for an instant
that the vast star-clustered sky was mine, and I heard
my name as if for the first time..."*

Heather Mize says

Decent writing but rather unfocused and not that memorable. I liked the Black Sea most and a few others. Overall I didn't find anything unique here.

Jobie says

I read this in about 30 minutes which isn't really a compliment for a book of poetry. Poetry should be something you relish. Few of these made me want to read them more than once. I typically like his work the stuff I've read online but I didn't connect with this. "Poem After the Seven Last Words, 5" was my favorite.
