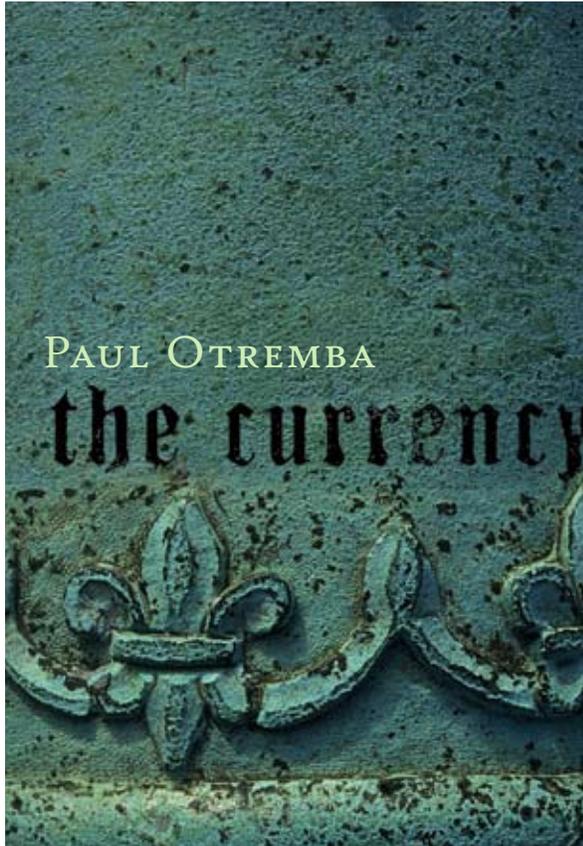


“[A]ustere and lush, cool and soulful. These poems are exhilaratingly achieved.” —Mark Doty

“Otremba promises to be an influential and important voice for his generation.” —Michael Collier



Publication Date: March 2009 • Poetry
Price: \$15.95 / paper / 6 x 9 • Pages: 74
ISBN: 978-1-884800-89-4

Orders: University Press of New England,
1-800-421-1561 / www.upne.com

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Four Way Books: editors@fourwaybooks.com

Conservatory

I saw it once, the place full of steam,
from behind the taxi's streaked window.

But in the park we were vulnerable,
exposed for the sky's opening. Running,

a small space opened near the small
of her back. Some nights I would

wake there. Then in dreams, her tongue
reflected with scales like the sides

of a glass fish. And there were other—
more important—rains. Still, what leaves?

What conservation of mettle? More dreams
proceeded, but the order came out wrong.

It was a vastness, the glass against the sky,
another couple up for anything,

or so it seemed from the railing.
On the sides of the glass fish swam

scrutiny, an abundance of fern.
And still others came by and said, Oh,

not that red, *that* red.



PAUL OTREMB A's poems and criticism have appeared in such places as *The Kenyon Review*, *Lyric*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Tikkun*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics*. He has won scholarships to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, a Barthelme Memorial Fellowship, a Krakow Poetry Seminar Fellowship, and an Academy of American Poets prize. He received his MFA from the University of Maryland, and he is completing his PhD at the University of Houston.

The Currency Press Release

Reckoning with and making a reckoning of what it is to look at the world and try to understand it, Paul Otremba's evocative debut, *The Currency*, investigates the intricacies of human emotion and sensation: "the small / thing wounded, and smaller / for seeming so willingly / breakable and displaced." With John Keats and the Greek philosopher Gorgias as tutelary spirits, *The Currency* holds what is current—what is both moving and present—to the light and revolves it, displaying its shades and shadows. Otremba's patient observation gives him the authority to describe

What the eyes
enter, would catch, is "YELLOW,"

immovable, is sere, ice, sand, glass.

The finely-sculpted poems of *The Currency* animate the world of art and architecture, from Caravaggio and Frank Gehry to the contemporary artist Maurizio Cattelan and the filmmaker Jean-Pierre Limosin. Exploring such works of art for how they lead us to pause for thought and breath, for how they infuse mind and body in equal measure, helping us keep and pass the time we spend, Otremba poignantly articulates the hues of familial life. One ghazal traces colors, Rothko-like, through a boy's life; another poem traces the speaker's fascination with doctors to a childhood encounter with his physician father. Art and life intermix seamlessly and you, like the book's speaker, will feel "I almost heard them move, / the figures beneath the photographs' gloss."

"Paul Otremba's remarkable first book, *The Currency*, is an intriguing foray into lyric epistemology that tries to come to terms with the implacable, paradox-ridden nature of knowledge and experience. These are deeply felt, deeply meditated poems guided by a sensibility highly attenuated to the physical world. In their openness to friendship and love and in their fearless directness, they remind me of the work of Larry Levis and Jon Anderson. Like Levis and Anderson, Otremba promises to be an influential and important voice for his generation."

—Michael Collier

"*I have made a place*, Paul Otremba quotes Mark Rothko describing his layered surfaces – which, like this poet's, are both austere and lush, cool and soulful. These poems are exhilaratingly achieved, and it seems exactly right that Keats should be the book's presiding spirit; Otremba's poems are both suffused with feeling and everywhere marked by signs of a restless, shaping intelligence. The combination makes this work bracing, and achingly alive."

—Mark Doty

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