

spring's beauty starkly contrast the drowning deaths of "liquored" (100) boys.

The final book, McFarland's most recent, and from which only a few poems are taken, *Ballgloves* is for the baseball enthusiast. The relatively long lines and narrative structure are a natural for these poetic stories: "When I was about eight, / my brother had a glove like this . . ." (121). Though most poems build to a universal theme—"With an old glove like this and a new baseball, / you could start the whole world over" (122)—appreciating the sport may be a prerequisite to feeling fully satisfied with these verses.

Stranger in Town: New and Selected Poems is an impressive, eclectic display of talent, the poems accessible through the casual, almost off-hand, delivery of a dazzling array of speakers.

—Richard Hologer

Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 330 pp., \$25 (paper).

Myths about Los Angeles depict the city as a forbidden territory, a violent land, an entertainment mecca—anything but a real place with historical roots where people live and are in constant need of better living conditions. Norman Klein's provocative book illustrates how such sensationalist constructions of Los Angeles gain dominance and displace memories of lived experiences. Throughout the history of Los Angeles, Klein argues, instability in white hegemony has led to overreactions in public policy, urban planning, and police practices, and these overreactions find expression in the built world (as freeways, demolished communities, and decimated public transportation systems). Once the material landscape is altered, memories lose their symbolic cues and history itself adapts to the dominant stories of urban growth. Building explicitly upon Mike Davis's scholarly excavations of unequal development in L.A., Klein concentrates on individual responses to demolished communities and how memories of these places become contaminated by media images or political declarations.

Klein develops a few versatile concepts to assist the reader through interpretations of myth and memory. *Imagos* are idealized representations that stand in for actual experiences (4). The *social imaginary* is a built environment that also contains an evacuation of meaning; the emphasis here is on the intersections of power, culture, and materiality—"A collective memory of an event or place that never occurred, but is built anyway" (10). *Distraction* indicates selective forgetting in a social imaginary (16), an instant when one imago covers another (13), or a manipulated erasure that occurs without notice (2). By way of these concepts,

Klein reads personal interviews against archival materials (pictures, ads, editorials, policies, novels, and films) to demonstrate patterns of memory erasure in Los Angeles.

The first dominant myth of Los Angeles, from the 1880s to 1930s, was that of the *climate*: an untouched garden of sunshine ripe for development yet wonderfully devoid of the evils of other major U.S. cities—pollution, overpopulation, and slums. The *freeway metropolis* myth came next, from 1936 to 1949, stressing the need to control an unruly nature that had led to uneven development and urban decay. L.A.'s impressive 1,200 miles of trolley lines were "erased" during this development phase (although some of the original tunnels still stand today as memory signifiers for those who know how to decipher them). Overlapping this freeway mythology was one of *downtown renewal*, justifying the elimination of ethnic (non-white) enclaves that had "nothing worth saving" anyway. According to Klein variations of these and other myths persist to this day and obscure the unwritten histories of communities while constraining the kinds of policies and practices that people consider reasonable. To challenge such formal constraints on memory, Klein interpolates some alternate parallel mythologies into his text, including several experimental "docufables" (brief fictive accounts of symbolic distractions) and a novella based on experiences of Vietnamese immigrants in Los Angeles. Klein's book is ultimately a gracefully normative, historical and ethnographic exploration of myth-making and memory in L. A.

—Torin Monahan