

Insect Country (A)
Reviewed by Craig Perez

Insect Country (A) (Dusie, 2006)

Sawako Nakayasu

E-Chapbook. 19 pages. Free at www.dusie.org

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Plath's Bees, Zukofsky's Mantis, and Dickinson's Fly are perhaps the most famous insects in poetic history. But if we created an anthology of poems about insects, we would have to include Sawako Nakayasu's Ants, featured in the free Dusie e-chapbook *Insect Country (A)*.

The chapbook opens with a single-line poem stretching, from gutter to margin, across 6 pages:

A trail of anything—insects, hamburgers, bicycles, popsicles, miniature lightning bolts, road maps—

anything, all of it, all lined up insidiously, all imagining the small of my back, envisioning it, bare, exposed to the light, sunlight, moonlight, halogen, fluorescent, all of it—seeing it, wanting it, nearing, fighting for, quietly, no—silently crowding, my small, and—

The long, trailing line embodies its content and prepares us for a surreal encounter with insects. Although Nakayasu uses this inter-page line in two previous works—*Clutch* (Tinfish, 2002) and *So We Have Been Given Time Or* (Verse Press, 2004)—it is most tied to its content in *Insect Country (A)*.

After we follow the “trail of anything” to its dangling conjunction, we reach the main body of the chapbook: 5 prose poems. In another previous work—*nothing fictional but the accuracy or arrangement (she)* (Quale Press, 2006)—Nakayasu experiments formally and thematically with the prose form, but here, the prose poems feel more constrained and composed:

Couch

for Maggie Siegel

After countless days and nights of living together, a couple decides to get divorced. It takes a little over a few hours of negotiating over their material possessions before they give up and decide to call the ants. She gets on the phone and calls up her ants, he gets up and calls his ants from his cell phone. The ants arrive at 8am on the following Monday, and quickly set to work. Around 4pm, the two return and enter gingerly, wondering if any progress has been made. While questions still fly about the room as to what will happen to the refrigerator, the records, and the television, they find that the couch has been broken down into small chunks, neat little couch chunks, all thanks to the his and her ant set they had received as a wedding gift.

In *Insect Country (A)*, anything is possible. Nakayasu takes full advantage of this surreal place, and presents us with ants that take on “very critical [stances]” against walking stools, and a cannibal who eats a person only to find the intestines filled with undigested ants. We—like the cannibal—have “no idea what to make of this new and bewildering situation”:

Girl Talk

We are sitting around the table eating and drinking and exchanging stories about flashers, gropers, underwear thieves, your general assortment of urban perverts. When I tell the story about the man who came up to me and opened up his bag and

offered me one of a teeming million wiggling ants in his bag, the whole table goes silent and I am reminded all over again how hard it is to get along with the women in this country.

Is “this country” referring to the United States (Nakayasu was born in Japan)? or is it referring to the “Insect Country”, where a man offering a bag of ants can be a gesture of friendship, can perhaps even be performance art. These poems leave an impression because they create the surreal plausibility of a country—for poetry—teeming with surprise and bewilderment.

Craig Santos Perez's reviews have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Pleiades*, *Jacket*, *Rattle*, *Boog City*, *Rain Taxi*, *Traffic*, *First Intensity*, *Slope*, and *Galatea Resurrects*. He blogs at blindelephant.blogspot.com.