

# All the Great Territories

Poems by  
Matthew Wimberley

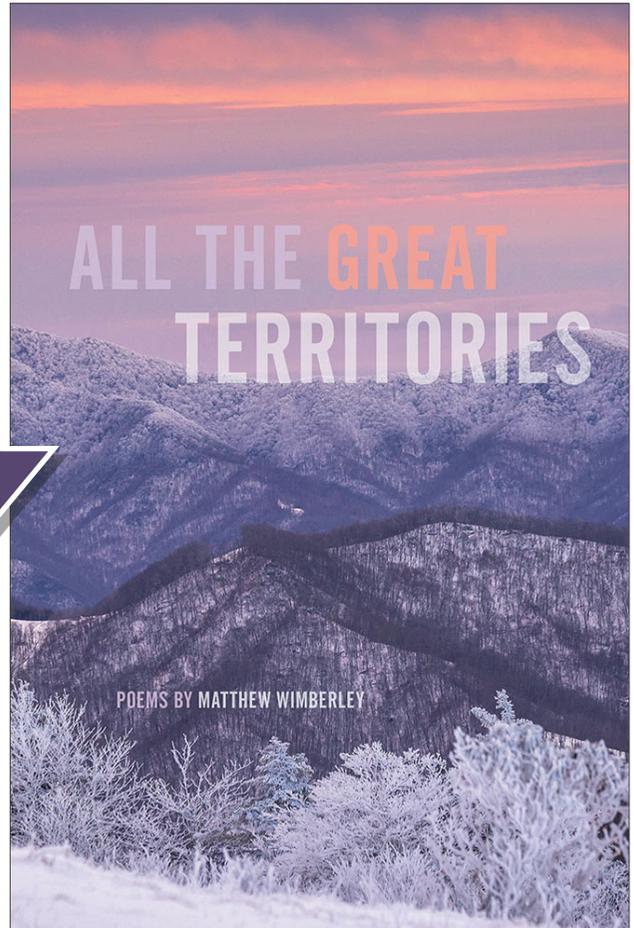
“Matthew Wimberley’s deeply intimate and lyrical collection *All the Great Territories* maps a son’s journey through the landscapes of loss—through empty towns and black mountains and snow-covered fields. Forged by tender observations, these poems seek to uncover personal histories half-buried under layers of dirt and ash. **They burn bright with elegy and longing for a father, a home, a memory of a life left behind.**”—Vandana Khanna, author of *Train to Agra*

## Exploring loss, love, and landscape in Appalachia

In 2012 Matthew Wimberley took a two-month journey, traveling and living out of his car, during which time he had planned to spread his father’s ashes. By trip’s end, the ashes remained, but Wimberley had begun a conversation with his deceased father that is continued here in his debut collection.

*All the Great Territories* is a book of elegies for a father as well as a confrontation with the hostile, yet beautiful landscape of southern Appalachia. In the wake of an estranged father’s death, the speaker confronts that loss while celebrating the geography of childhood and the connections formed between the living and the dead. The narrative poems in this collection tell one story through many: a once failed relationship, the conversations we have with those we love after they are gone. In an attempt to make sense of the father-son relationship, Wimberley embraces and explores the pain of personal loss and the beauty of the natural world.

Stitching together sundered realms—from Idaho to the Blue Ridge Mountains and from the ghost of memory to the iron present of self—Wimberley produces a map for reckoning with grief and the world’s darker forces. At once a labor of love and a searing indictment of those who sensationalize and dehumanize the people and geography of Appalachia, *All the Great Territories* sparks the reader forward, creating a homeland all its own. “Because it’s my memory I can give it to you,” Wimberley’s speaker declares, and it’s a promise well kept in this tender and remarkable debut.



Paper: 978-0-8093-3773-6

E-book: 978-0-8093-3774-3

\$16.95, 84 pages

Crab Orchard Series in Poetry

**Matthew Wimberley** received his MFA in poetry from New York University. His poems have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Missouri Review*, *Poem-a-Day*, *diode*, *Pleiades*, *Shenandoah*, and *River Styx*, among others.

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**BLACK MOUNTAINS**

This isn't a goodbye.  
 The sun goes down  
 in the west to push spring  
 up through the earth. I've heard  
 painted trillium have bloomed  
 in the hills of the desolate world.  
 The moon tries thirty different ways  
 a month to move us  
 closer. Tonight it's not there.  
 I've loved more than you—  
 darker, broken things.

**HOMILY**

Good evening of the Lord.  
 The gravestones open  
 out of the dark like stag horns  
 through the whitetail's skull.  
 In the Valley of the Cross  
 the five names of the five  
 sacred wounds are nailed  
 into fence posts and black cherry.

Forgive those who trespass  
 this patch of strawberries  
 beyond the garden's edge—

those who mistake a turkey feather  
 for a hawk's. Forgive  
 the breastfeeding mother  
 who lifts her shirt, rubs  
 her ribs and flat stomach,  
 praising the new muses—  
 benzodiazepine, methamphetamine.  
 Her son in her hands,

a rotted apple eaten to the seeds. Bless  
 his unwashed neck and knotted hair,  
 his shoulder blades piercing toward heaven.

Taking the long way home  
 I'm thinking of the faces  
 I've seen, appearing  
 around each bend, staring out  
 over the spears of goldenrod.

**PANTOUM HOLDING AN EXTINCT BIRD**

I have touched the last proof of a concept—  
 Ivory-billed woodpecker, specimen in a drawer.  
 My father, slag-ash, carbon, rising  
 through the air like a fury of wings.

Ivory-billed woodpecker, specimen in a drawer,  
 diminishes into an old light  
 through the air like a fury of wings.  
 The silence one horizon tells another

diminishes into an old light.  
 It is early, the mountain insouciant—  
 the silence one horizon tells another,  
 a taciturn boy standing over a body.

It is early, the mountain insouciant.  
 I touch the last proof of a concept—  
 a taciturn boy standing over a body,  
 my father—slag-ash, carbon, rising.

**ELEGY NEAR LITTLE BLACK PINE ROUGH**

I will mourn him  
 alone, as I could not  
 that February,  
 or days later at the church  
 where the used-car salesmen  
 slouched in the pews  
 and the pews complained  
 for lack of emptiness. Weeks  
 went by and still nothing. Not  
 from Boone to Llano, Aurora,  
 threading northwest through the Wind  
 River Range, and all the way  
 to the Pacific. Not here. The map  
 is a coffin I can't bury him in  
 and so I've kept him from the earth—  
 undisturbed and cold.  
 I do not know why. It's evening.  
 The flies of summer enumerate,  
 spin through the air and the dead  
 limbs cracked from last week's  
 storm hold on.