

Marc Zegans
The Book of Clouds
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Review by Lo Galluccio

In Italo Calvino's 'Invisible Cities' Marco Polo is a messenger to Kublai Khan and his reports to the Emperor are dream-like and baroque descriptions of cities to which he's traveled. In the middle of the book, Polo admits that all of these cities are tropes on Venice, so even though they are all unique in design, style, purpose, essence, they have a Venice-like template. In short, all the cities are the same city.

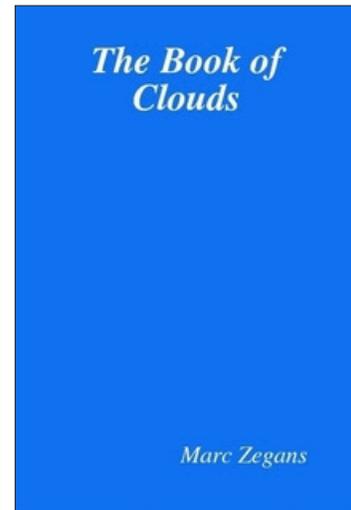
In Marc Zegans latest collection, "The Book of Clouds" he relates an offering made to a loved one-- a friend or lover-- of a flange of clouds. In this assortment, there are many different kinds of clouds, yet one wonders if they are all variations on the very first cloud in the book, given to the loved one as pleasure, diversion, protection and whim.

In the first poem, the beloved asks for a "cloud tonight/a cloud hanging over the Pacific/high above the sunset, glowing with dusk." At the poem's end we understand that the author and object of the cloud will be tethered together --"you sit on the beach in a small chair/your stringed toe rocking me on my cloud gently." It is a beautiful image of a cloud, like a balloon tied to a toe that is rocking, while the lover sits on the beach. We can picture dusk, perhaps the most lovely time to be on any beach as the sun starts to set. The second poem is quite simple -- "Would you like a cloud tonight?/ I think so./What sort of cloud?/ A simple cloud that you will pull with you as you walk the beach." This is a compacted version of the first poem story. It echoes the first one, like a bell's resonance.

There are all wonder of clouds in this collection: clouds heavy with night rain, clouds of magnificent colors, clouds of wakefulness and sleep. Each cloud intended as a lullaby, a cushion, a spectacle for the beloved. In number 7, denoted by a roman letter, the poet writes:

"As though dropping from a wall/you fall into tonight's spun grey-cloud/softer than lambs wool, stronger than silk. It stretches around your sides, cradling your leap into dreamless sleep."

Thus cloud as cradle or hammock leading to a sleep without dreams. Sometimes we just want to sleep and not be beset with dreams, good or bad. This is one condition that this poem grants the beloved with a magical grey cloud. There is also this cloud's opposite coming right after, "Free and festive, rested now for many days/you ask me for a cloud of vivid dreams/and I give you this cloud of radiant white/from which you can draw a million colors/strand upon strand/on which to weave your dreams."



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Cloud 14 is a simple play on words: [c]loud/thunder/clap! The loud noise of the thunder is derived from the thunder cloud that claps to herald a storm. There are thin clouds, and shy clouds that cleanse the day from weary eyes. The most obvious benefit of these story-book clouds is that they promote sleep. In cloud 19 the cloud's colors transmute "From byzantine to aubergine/amethyst through mauve into orchid/eggplant entwined with English violet/the varied purples of your cloud/remove the robes of public office/leaving you only, ready for sleep.

In number 22, we find another cloud offering by the poet: "Your cloud glows Venetian Red/it has the scent of history/and the lushness of ripened fruit./ And in number 24, "Your cloud tonight is a delicious/confection of oranges and lemons/with enough cream to make a Pavlova."

So the author explores the cloud as being a confection, like cotton candy, or full of cream like the Pavlova cake mentioned. These poems are delightful offerings to the loved one's hunger and add a dimension of taste to the clouds. There is also an overall quality of parfait to these poems. They are easy to take in, like a light dessert, something that cleanses the palate after a heavy meal or nourishes the dreamer with beauty and devotion.

In number 25, "this cloud floats over horses/grazing on the salt-breeze grass by Muir Beach./ and it travels "by jet stream to meet you/the scents of eucalyptus and sea sliding you into enchanted sleep. We are keenly aware of the fresh and minty perfume emitted by this cloud and how it provokes a wondrous night's sleep.

I should mention that this book was set up so that there is only one poem for every page and nothing but space adjoining that page. The author wants the reader to be able to envision his clouds without any confusing juxtapositions. So the poem, like a cloud, inhabits its own piece of the sky. Each page tells a story about a cloud enchanting the beloved's existence and mainly his/her's sleep. There are many delightful stories in this collection, dedicated to those ephemeral yet clearly manifest phenomena, clouds. In the final poem, number 31, the poet concludes: "Tonight's cloud is the cloud you have made/the cloud in need of no other/the cloud drawn from the light you have bestowed."

Marc Zegans is the author of "The Underwater Typewriter," "Boys in the Woods" and "The Book of Clouds." He is also a spoken word artist and an artist's consultant: [marc zegans: creative development advisor | Helping Artists, Writers, and Creative People Thrive and Shine](#)