

Review: *Forgery*

Forgery by Amira Hanafi: Green Lantern Press 2011

by Lily Robert-Foley

I read the last page of *Forgery* by Amira Hanafi. I close the book, letting the back cover return to its pages, soldered together with string, glue, all pages flush, unlike bricks in that way, the mortar invisible, abstract, like the structures of language, clamped only by the binding's powers of persuasion, although coming apart, air between pages, a sliver of declining shadow in the isosceles triangle made between cover and cover page, sign of my hours of reading, my opening and stretching of the binding, the glue.

Forgery (published by The Green Lantern Press, a Chicago based small press), is about Chicago. Although to say *Forgery* is *about* Chicago, is perhaps misleading—not to say it isn't true. However, the preposition “about” signifies discursive distance. If I say, this review is “about” *Forgery*, I picture a set of imaginary arrows originating in my text and pointing (I imagine downward) at my copy of *Forgery*, which is perhaps lying on the floor, my own gaze passing through a page with my review onto the book. (In fact, I feel it would be more accurate to say that this review is *on* *Forgery*, in which case you can imagine this review placed directly on top *Forgery* in a stack of books).

Forgery is not *about* Chicago, *Forgery* is Chicago. You will say to me, “*Forgery* is not Chicago, *Forgery* is a book. I know the difference between a book and a city. A book is far too small to be a city. How could anyone live in a book? How could we build structures in a book? How can we carry out the directives of infrastructure in a book?”

The reason I would like to omit the preposition is because prepositions define distances. Although they may sometimes define the lack of distance (for example: in, through, across etc. and their derivatives), this lack of distance nevertheless indicates the possibility of distance and therefore of separation. What *Forgery* accomplishes is an obliteration of this separation (of the separation between text and subject).

How is this possible? Perhaps it is not. It depends entirely on what you consider the word “Chicago” to mean. Chicago is a “city.” What does the word “city” mean. No. Not the word. The city. What does a city *mean*. Or. No. *How* does a city mean. This is the question *Forgery* asks.

In 2009, I moved from Chicago to Paris, where I still live today. Sometimes as I am weaving my way through the skinny Parisians, negotiating their mimetically skinny streets, I pass by tiny businesses squeezed into spaces left over between buildings, their windows stacked high with objects in rhizomatic patterns. I enter, the space is sardined, overflowing with objects seeming to have little or no coherent relationship with each other. A man behind a counter is perpetually busy (although casually so, taking frequent pauses to chat with a customer or drink a tiny cup of coffee). What does he do? Nothing. Everything. He fixes things. What things? What do you got? He is a *bricoleur*.

The principle of bricolage is: I have a problem, I have no idea how to fix it. I have many materials and tools but none of them correspond absolutely to my problem. So I use something that addresses a part of that problem until that something no longer seems relevant, and then I will look for something else. The resulting project bears the traces of these tools and materials, reproduces a reciprocation of their forms, the forms their functions produce.

A city is bricolée (The word “bricoleur” or “bricolage” comes from the verb “bricoler.” It is untranslatable). It is patched together by an indeterminate set of tools, it is taken apart, and put back

together, pieces of it recycled, new buildings constructed from old materials, the materials divorced from their original function. It is patchwork, the features of its landscape historically contingent, derived from necessity and not from ideality. I cannot draw a blueprint of a city and then build that city, the city comes in pieces, birthed in shards, assembled willy-nilly, the blue-print comes after. And changes always. (Even and especially in Paris, and Chicago, where many have come with their blueprints to unsuccessfully manufacture a city that corresponds to their idea of the city.)

Forgery is like this. It is a homology of Chicago's history, its construction process. It does not mimic nor reproduce the appearance of Chicago, nor interpret it, nor make a story of it, but rather it reproduces the very mechanisms that created Chicago: bricolage. In this case however, the material is not steel, brick, concrete, wood... it is DOCUMENTS. *Forgery* has one page of bibliography for every 11 1/3 pages in the book. It is situated in the tradition of the "cut up" (à la Burroughs, Bellamy etc.) The text is composed of pieces of source texts, disassembled and rearranged, guided and directed by our author, Amira Hanafi, to create this lovely, perplexing book, equal parts chaos and control.

In this case however, the question is not the production of text, but the production of the city. Or rather the place where these two intersect: in the invisible structure that emerges out of the alliance between the two. This alliance is the stuff of *Forgery*. In it, we see the history and composition of Chicago emerge. We see the structures of language dissolve into the material of Chicago, its documents, the text, texture of history. *Forgery* is the most objective rendering of history possible, for it is the very substance of history, and enacts its processes. It is simultaneously concrete and ink, it both builds and edits. This is history: the coming together of raw material and documents. History itself is bricolage, the echo of Hanafi's bricolage. *Forgery*: both the melding of material, and the fabrication of discourse.

A city is made from steel and wood and plastic and concrete and brick and glass (etc.), that combine together to make a set of contingent structures. But a city is not merely the sum total of a perpetually varying number of visible structures. It is also invisible. Assembled from invisible structures such as those that bind a book, that lock its pages together. *Forgery* is a representation of these structures, their production, in perpetual revision, and likewise the forging of an armature that links our tangible cities to abstract ones.

Out of cities another city is built. I, my body, become an nth city that is invisible, like the structures of language holding the pages of Hanafi's book together. These are the structures of my cities. It is indistinguishable from something I might call my soul or my set of ideologies or my interpretations of cognitive perceptions. The very visible phenomena of streets, buildings, trains, lamp posts, mailboxes, sidewalks, the shape of the sky as it appears through the tops of the buildings, shifting according to my perspective as I make my journeys between the places, the people I know, love, bound to the intangible networks I use to order my universe, to attach words and things to each other. I read *Forgery* and I am infused with the documents that give us a history of Chicago. As I read, I bricole. The text is opaque, concrete, made from actual material (documents, paper, ink, sentences). Unlike most history books, *Forgery* does not shine a light through the documents to reveal an invented structure "hiding" somewhere beneath, for it recognizes that although structure may give birth to documents, those structures are impossible for us see. All we can do is forge new structures from old materials, bricolons documents to build new texts. In *Forgery* the order of document to history is inverted. Documents, normally considered "second" texts, addenda, bibliography, supplementary. In *Forgery* the document is history, becomes history through its reordering, as it also is Chicago. So how do I read this book that is Chicago, made from steel, concrete, wood, brick, paper, document? I reassemble it for myself, insert it into my own city, the nth city that is my pneuma. And in this way Hanafi's city is part of my invisible

city in the same way Chicago is, a source text in my cut up.

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