

**FRONT NINE: A BIOGRAPHY OF
PLACE: POEMS BY RIKKI SANTER.
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Rikki Santer.

The biography of a place, as of a person, needs an interesting character. Although W. C. Williams proved in *Paterson* that just about anywhere people have lived will do, the Newark Earthworks are ready-made for a biographer. They form one of the largest ancient monuments in the world, precisely aligned to the rising of the full moon at the northernmost point of its 18.6 year cycle. After the Hopewell, who built the earthworks, disappeared, they were forgotten for more than a thousand years, and studied seriously only in the twentieth century. Unlike such megalithic monuments as Stonehenge, they blend into the natural world around

them; they are obviously not natural, since they are geometric in form, but their vast size and shapes, coherent only from the air, keep them from separating themselves from their environment.

This blending of natural and artificial is likely what the Hopewell intended, but it is unlikely that they intended their work to be the setting for a golf course, any more than the builders of Stonehenge envisioned a fantasy golf course inside the sarcens. The strange juxtaposition of two unrelated cultures is the subject of Rikki Santer's *Front Nine*. Sometimes she meditates on the co-existence of past and present in a fixed space, sometimes on the conflicts between sacred and secular, sometimes both at once, for example: "The ball splashes pine needles/then rolls to a slow stop/ where 2,084 years earlier/a Hopewell priest crouched,/detouring unwanted spirits" ("Chorus").

She also mixes verse and prose: a chronology, snippets from golf magazines, verse narrative, a villanelle, prose poems, and voices ranging from a Cherokee woman to an Oxford archeologist. This is the same approach Williams took in *Paterson*, but on a much smaller scale, focused intently on that golf course and the personality of the places immediately around it. This is a well-designed small book that consistently beats par.

Edward Lense