“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.

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.

Read more at www.siupress.com/great_territories
POEMS

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.

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.

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.

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.