

Beloved Idea

Ann Killough

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Disentangling the complicated intersections of faith and American identity drive the progression of the twenty-three poems that make up *Beloved Idea*. The 2003 winner of the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize, this is Killough's first book-length collection of poetry.

Beloved Idea is a collection of prose poems in which the basic unit of grammar is the sentence, and the basic unit of meaning the metaphor. Interested in the way language creates or deflates meaning, Killough explores the power of the metaphor as an "unspeakable opening," manifesting itself in her first poem as a wound that makes its writer vulnerable to the violence of misreading. The collection is concerned specifically with the way language, literal and figurative, constructs a collective identity like that of nation or body politic. She meditates on "the gluttonous national / evangelism of understanding. / Within which the beloved idea hung like a lost sheep" in "body in evidence."

Killough's privileging of the metaphor as the sacred idea proposes a poetic alternative to the focus on the literal word so often associated with evangelicalism. In poems like "the boy and slave on the raft," "white whale," and "Statue of Liberty," she explores symbolic and literary representations of the nation. In "Statue of Liberty," she imagines the statue as an omniscient agent with the capacity to "change something even in you, even in me." In her poem the historic landmark becomes more than simply a receptacle for nationalist ideals.

Long sentences and enjambment accumulate, the lines overflow with meaning. The poems skirt on the edge of the breakdown of language as the metaphor takes on a variety of guises: sheep's clothing, Melville's white whale, an astronaut, the Mississippi River. The challenge of such a project is to keep the metaphor from becoming unmoored from its referent altogether. Taking that risk, *Beloved Idea* uses the idea of the metaphor to create pluralities of meaning within one word or symbol.

KEYA KRAFT (October 9, 2007)

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