ForeWord Reviews

Bewitched Playground
David Rivard
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Here are poems of a non-confessional tone, which consider the thoughts and emotions one may have, but may not always be willing to admit. Specifically, Rivard explores the tension between the life that he is suddenly living when he becomes a father and all of the other lives and possibilities which are not his own. Experiences are apprehended in terms of sensuality, which gives way to a longing, explained as a way of teaching himself to be that which he wishes to become. The honesty with which this is achieved, acts as a reminder that poems at their best should aim to elucidate the human condition as it is, without dress-up.

Remaining within close earshot of home, Rivard writes forthrightly about choices not made, of unattempted suicides, imagined sexual possibilities and undefining personal characteristics. The self, accusing the self "makes itself necessary," sketching the blueprint for poems about domestic realities, side by side with the nagging "other-ness" of dreams.

Characteristic of Rivard's style is the devotional attention he offers to the distinguishing particulars of his poetic landscape: an amulet of cheerios strung around his daughters neck, the unfurled pair of wings tattooed on a mother's back or the black name badges worn by Mormon missionaries declaring their brave sense of belonging on his doorstep. Likewise, he is attentive to the dark comedy suggested in objects that on the surface appear benign, but when seen from his perspective, carry great emotional weight. For example, when the baby seat in the back of his car is spied by two of his unfettered friends, the result is a revealing commentary on sexuality and the responsibilities of a man with a family to return to.

Rivard writes about expectations and disappointments, often conveying a wish to be free in some sense or the other: "but free to do what, leave myself behind?" However tempting the alternatives may be, his speculation is restrained, avoiding a tone that is oppressively impatient or discontent. Meanwhile, all of the drama of one man's discourse on the meaning and purpose of it all is interestingly contained beneath a parachute that owes much to the grounded harmony that ultimately prevails. Here, fatherhood and matrimony are not the victims of the usual bashings, which in other forums lead to an image of disrepute and makes this volume an exception.

Holly Wren Spaulding