

Captivity Narrative

Mary Ann Samyn

Ohio State University Press

978-0-8142-0832-8

(July 31, 1999)

In Samyn's prefatory note to *Captivity Narrative*, she explains that the structure of the text, "is based on early American "captivity narratives," accounts of frontier captures, which were divided...into 'removes' that indicated a change in location from one wilderness encampment to another."

This note sets the stage for these challenging and sometimes difficult poems that often trace movements from one wild place of words to another. These "removes" are rarely literal, and though sometimes inspired by actual captivity narratives, they generally focus on associations of captivity as political states of being or on figurative states of mind that reflect metaphorical captivity. Despite, allusions to the narratives, these poems are deeply feminist and contemporary in nature, examining—through trappings such as dolls, mirrors, *Nancy Drew*, *Alice in Wonderland* and the dash (punctuation)—the way in which the psyche enters, adapts to and frees itself from various states of entrapment.

Once readers suspend expectations created by the title and explore her adept and inventive wordplay, the poems become alternately wry and dark, ironic and intense. She exhibits a sharp awareness of the double entendre, as displayed in the poem, "A Short History of Anxiety," in which she writes "Even the vocabulary is dazzling: //For Example/architectonic and corset,// which are sort of the same thing,/ or so historians tell us/ in discussions of the fashioning/ of the body shape, the inner layers// and 'the peel'..."

She is, however, relentless in her direct assault on the female image, "Holding nothing, your stomach/ is a jeweled purse, Glitter/ its sound, its beautiful anger." Though this is a difficult collection, the virtuosity of her image making and the movement of the poems from one untamed site to another will captivate readers.