ForeWord Reviews

case sensitive
Kate Greenstreet
Ahsahta Press
978-0-916272-89-0
(Sep 15, 2006)

This book is as much about paying respects as it is about forging ahead—an ideal combination for a debut collection. The author adds grains of literary wisdom to accompany her own brand, which is more of the homegrown variety. She essentially christens her own canon, ranging from Osip Mandelstam to Lorine Niedecker to Mark Kurlansky, author of *Salt: A World History*, whom she cites often in her section appropriately titled "[Salt]." This collection of poems is pastiche without the tongue-in-cheek tone usually expected from that genre. Indeed, while Greenstreet uses a large number of quotations, they all seem lovingly inserted.

It is hard to believe that such a well-researched book of poems could seem organic, but somehow this volume manages such ease. The trick is perhaps joining facts with speculation and mystery. For example, the speaker asserts in her poem, "[will smother flames]" that "You know how if you hold a magnifying glass / above a piece of paper outside, the light will burn it? / Something like that is happening to my clothes. / I used to think it was you."

Although the "you" of these poems is never identified, the addressee is familiar. The poet reveals just enough to lead her readers through what could easily be disorienting pieces. Greenstreet holds steady to her claim that "A story has to leave out nearly everything or nobody can follow it." The poet places her faith in what is gained from experiences including experiences of reading) rather than the experiences themselves.

With a chapbook called *Learning the Language*, and a fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Greenstreet continues to write intrepid pieces, ignoring traditional definitions of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Despite being her first book, *case sensitive* displays a mature disregard for genre. Perhaps Greenstreet is emboldened by the shoulders she chooses to stand on. Or perhaps she realizes that the complications of life do not fit neatly into categories. As she maintains in "Where's the body," "Things got complicated when we started to walk upright you know, the constant threat of falling)."

While the speaker of these poems may be wary of such inevitable tumbles in life, the poet is unafraid of failure. In fact, part of the pleasure of reading them is their unpredictability. The other part of the pleasure is their careful execution regardless of unruly subject matters: “You have to fight the idea it should be / cleaner, easier, natural.” And Greenstreet does just that.

Erica Wright