FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Poetry

Chinoiserie
Karen Rigby
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Winner of the 2011 Sawtooth Poetry Prize, selected by Paul Hoover, Karen Rigby's debut collection simmers with disquiet and the
cosmopolitan smarts of one who may be so
self-sufficient in the hard world that she can write, "I understand why a man rapes / before dawn: for the red-rimmed eye, / fearful and waiting." This passage and others suggest that the way to survive femaleness is through knowledge, which, in the case of this writer, seems mainly derived from those significant works of film and literature which comprise any hip coed's liberal arts education.

Rigby quotes the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca: "But forgetfulness does not exist, dreams do not exist; flesh exists," then proceeds to write how others have seen the body and the flesh—filmmakers like Annaud and Kazan, and performers like Dietrich and Hayworth. But these are other artists' visions, others' bodies. Rigby stands apart: the keen observer, fraught with an appetite that appears to go unsatisfied, possibly due to self-denial. She's hungry but so contained that one wonders if she'll be able to cross the distance between her own desire and that which gives true sustenance rather than merely the representation of it. As a reader, one feels some pleasure at being able to follow the many allusions and references, but also a little bored with the aesthetic. Where is Rigby's own one-of-a-kind beating heart? What does she see and feel without someone else's lens?

So much of this collection is dark, bloody, black. In one poem, the poet appears as Salome in the film *Sunset Boulevard*—does the poet prefer to be a character other than herself?—saying "I could live forever / raising my own hand to my neck, / each time surprised by its cool pulse. / In that kohl-rimmed prime / I calculate seductions stair by stair." Elsewhere, Rigby writes that there is "no end to the double-life," which is perhaps the condition of all writers whose literary modus operandi is to speak in other voices and inhabit other lives, and, so,

will necessarily experience some bifurcation and estrangement from their own bodies. It's most interesting to witness such an act when it feels authentic, but is that possible when artifice is inherent to the metamorphosis?

And yet, there are also poems about food—basic ingredients that give nourishment and provide warmth to the poet's actual body—and in these poems we are not kept at a distance, but rather smell the bones and onions and marjoram in the borscht, and it's a kind of relief to sip that broth with her.

Holly Wren Spaulding