FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Poetry

Circles Where the Head Should Be
Cacki Wilkinson
University of North Texas Press
978-1-57441-309-0
(January 31, 2011)

"[S]he sees, in common junk, a raw pizzazz / that's worth preserving and, an avid hoarder, / builds shoebox reliquaries: dead bugs, pet / pebbles and shells, goose feathers, bits of string, / the last matryoshka stolen from a set / some origami swans. That sort of thing." As demonstrated in her poem "Bildungsroman" Caki Wilkinson is a master of formal architecture constructing well-wrought poems of refuse and oddities. In Circles Where the Head Should Be, the first collection by poet Wilkinson, one is immediately impressed by an exacting control of language and her seemingly effortless litanies. Closer examination reveals that the intricate structures she builds are but trappings—thickets to house frailer, more elusive creatures.

Though her craft demonstrates tight control of language, Wilkinson holds her subjects delicately. The rich and intricate brocade she embroiders is in itself dazzling, but it can also be as formidable as an exoskeleton. Getting at the meat may require a little heft. Wilkinson writes, "I'm honest more or less, / an open book. Just dim the lights / so I can change. Don't look." The poems are a community in themselves, raisings families, living in eccentricity behind lavish or scanty curtains, going to junior college, the zoo—they are diversely and densely populated. And like any densely populated community—there's much to occlude intimacy, as in the poem "Girl Under Bug Zapper," in which a neglected child's frailty begets its own brutality, "…she'd rather celebrate / the world unhinged, its crooked scales and stakes, / part-of-one who plucks these wings, / confetti in her folded palms. Frail things." The problems of frailty and brutality are also evidenced in Wilkinson's exquisite poem "Storm and Stress," which opens: "That a spider web supports a bead of rain / is as significant / as rain's resolve." But just as the poem seems about to reveal its secret, it ducks under cover with "Don't ask me what it's worth," leaving the reader with a web destroyed and rain's evaporation.

As deftly as the title character in her award winning poem "Bower Bird," Wilkinson weaves structures to house the delicate creatures and societies she explores, demonstrating how

our trappings can also become entrapments. In “Bower Bird” she writes, “Bizarre, this art through which he resurrects / a story of disjointed parts, the cause / extracted from his manifold effects— / call it a burnished hut, a self-made…cage”. Recipient of the Ruth Lilly Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation, as well as Atlantic magazine’s 2008 Student Writing Contest for poetry, Caki Wilkinson has received numerous honors. Winner of the Vassar Miller Prize in poetry, Circles Where The Head Should Be is recommended reading for poetry fans, particularly those interested in new formalism.

Jen Steinnorth