

Cup

Jeredith Merrin

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These poems, about a daughter with a cancer, offer rich contemplation and deft formal technique.

Jeredith Merrin begins her poetry collection *Cup* with a tidal wave, the near mythic Poroca of Brazil, “a twelve-foot wall of water with the rumble of a train.” She likens it to the release of suppressed childhood fury, born of abuse; here, it becomes the overwhelming wave that exhilarates as it terrifies and brings a body and soul free from the tyranny of memory. That facing it, as Yusef Kurniyakaa might call it, drives the book—facing the failures of her parents, of herself as a parent, of her inability to keep her child safe from disease, of her inevitable aging. Bold, personal, and humorous, Merrin crafts a book rich with experience and understanding.

Merrin carves the book into four sections. The first introduces her own experience of parental ambivalence. In “The Terminator,” she writes of her mother calling her and her sister “to come to dinner, / her young voice in the fresh half-dark conflicted, / caught between wanting and not wanting us back.” One of Merrin’s virtues is her empathy: for her mother who hurt her; for the sister who cannot bear any reminders of the past, including Merrin; for her daughter, who demands an apology for her mother’s distraction in her childhood.

The second section is arguably the most powerful, as Merrin navigates her way through her daughter’s experience with cancer. By turns tender and enraged, the section culminates with “The Visit,” a poem rife with gratitude and joy: “What secret preconditions for the true and perfect life?” A simple day of sunshine and talk with her recovering daughter becomes “reality re-burnished, shoulders sun-unstrained, / around us wavelets lapping. Easeful. Celadon.” The last two sections on age and beauty offer praise, though not without caution, perhaps as a response to the turmoil of the first two sections.

Merrin’s work plays with rhythm and form, syllabics and sound. The formal tension is delightfully subtle and pleasing to the ear without being overwhelming. Often, she employs slant rhyme to keep the momentum soft, its very subtlety a sure sign of mastery.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (Spring 2015)

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