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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ POETRY

Each and Her

Valerie Martinez
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"Since 1993, over 450 girls and women have been murdered in or near the cities of Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico, along the US–Mexico border," Valerie Martinez writes. "…Despite local and federal investigations, intermittent arrests, and an international awareness of the murders, they continue in what appears to be a higher rate than in previous years…86 in 2008." *Each and Her* is a startling and deeply moving search for what is lost and can never be found.

Martinez masterfully employs a unique form, compiling small poems, pieces of poems, and found poems, as if gathering clues or "scraps / of women's clothes," as if following a trail that would somehow lead her back to the girls and the women lost. Some pieces are clips from newspapers, while others come from works of mythology, literature, horticultural advice books, art, or religious texts; much is her own lyric verse. Martinez invites readers to follow her as she navigates through disparate pieces of information into the unfathomable dark. She beckons with small gestures, small pieces of text, and with a tenderness, almost as one might imagine a monster beckoning a child into his lair. One page only holds the words "this way"; another says:

this
way.

Martinez's adept use of white space and delicate emotion makes the prospect of turning away from the world she makes more difficult than following her more deeply into the text. One travels:

all the way from Juarez
from griddle to oven rack
the stack of warm
and freckled tortillas

From the migration of people over hard terrain, readers leap to the migration of tortillas between dishes; from "warm / and freckled" bread, sustainer of life, to a stack of bodies, cold, multitudinous, and lifeless. Her use of space also evokes the absence of all that has been lost: daughters, sisters, mothers… answers, justice. The space is irreversible; the pieces don't fit together any longer, but neither can they be severed one from the other. Again one must leap, this time over the physical terrain of the page; one leaps, falls, and lands unsettled; it is not enough "knowing them / only like this."

Valerie Martinez, Santa Fe's poet laureate, is the author of several books, essays, and translations. In this singular, long poem of many parts, she provides a way of seeing the real people in the mass of bodies, in the abstract account numbers. In a time when overwhelming figures can numb our consciousness, Martinez demands that we regard the lives which have been lost and which continue to be lost in the dark.
JENNIFER SPERRY STEINORTH (September / October 2010)

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