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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ POETRY

Etching in Sand

Nancy Elizabeth Haddon
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Good poetry makes readers think beyond the obvious. Each word within a line is a building block in the foundation of one stanza and then another. Like the shaping of a Bonsai tree, poets trim extraneous words and syllables until eventually, if the poet is lucky, a structured poem forms through a symbiotic relationship of rhythm, emotion, thought, imagination, and sometimes rhyme.

The power of a poem is limited by off-kilter rhythm, odd meter, forced rhyme, and the overuse of certain words in a rhyme scheme. Unless the writer has the ability of Ogden Nash, the artistry of Dr. Seuss, or the musical showmanship of rapper Eminem, most rhyming poems sound strained and amateurish, or contain the surface sentiment of a greeting card. Nancy Elizabeth Haddon's collection of poetry, *Etching in Sand*, contains many poems that illustrate how exerted and predictable rhyme can kill a poem. Her compilation of more than three hundred poems contains only seven or eight works that show true originality, and two or three that are really good. "The Opening" is a standout piece that describes childbirth without flowery allusions and goes beyond the obvious. She writes:

> *And then today; the package moved.*
> *Unwrapping itself*
> *Opening itself up and delivering its contents*
> *All grey and strange,*
> *But turning color*
> *Until it became the softest pink.*
> *And then the delivery man reached down*
> *And cut the last yellow cord that bound it to its*
> *Package.*
> *And then it cried.*
> *And so did I.*

After an offering with such potential, Haddon then gives readers the short poem "Myself": "I am the rusty remains of things I never knew… / A lost piece of a puzzle that was to [sic] hard to do… / I am too many yesterdays I cannot recall… / A tottering Humpty Dumpty, just waiting for the fall…." Rather than these clichés, readers of poetry want to know about the actual puzzle: is the poet a corner piece that completes the frame? Or an inside piece—the guts? They want to know the height of the potential fall and what it is like to be "a tottering Humpty Dumpty."

Although the majority of Haddon's poetry is weak, a handful of poems near the end of the book, like "The Bretton Woods II" and "Southern Belle" demonstrate some promise for the evolution of her poetry. *Etching in Sand* is a rough draft from which Haddon should learn and grow to become a stronger and more insightful poet.
LEE GOODEN (June 28, 2010)

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