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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ POETRY

Exaltation

Michael Indemaio
Acrylic Verbs Press 2010 (May 25, 2010)
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Michael Indemaio's *Exaltation*, which strives to convey the poet's "passion and pain," takes its philosophical inspiration from Romantic poet John Keats' renowned statement, "beauty is truth, truth beauty." Unfortunately, this buoyant poetry book, the author's second, lacks the substantive strength of clarity and imagery to hold up its intent. Even though the book's narrative stance emerges from the writer's "snapshots of life," there's no grounding sense of an identifiable self that would distinguish him from another. In addition, there's no visual equivalents to carry "an extraordinary place to know beautiful / brilliant people," so readers are left with large sweeping statements, clichés, and lackluster language.

Exaltation navigates truth, beauty, love, loss, freedom, dream, vices, etc.—all the great abstracts of a sensate world. Indemaio offers pithy aphorisms like, "This is just the way we know that beauty has no walls," "Love is the value," and "The truth exists regardless if you accept it." Many of *Exaltation*'s assumptive convictions follow the preface's claim, "There can be no one truth for you and another for me." Despite the highly personal stance that many of the poems take, the speaker wants us to know the difference between the "ruthless truthless unworlds of their parents" and "There's only truth, no greater plan." One can't help but think of Kafka's play on the subject: "It's difficult to tell the truth, since there is only one truth, but that truth is alive and therefore has a lively, changing face."

When Indemaio declares, "Because truth is enough," it seems he wants to justify his own lack of specificity in his writing, leaving the reader to imagine what comes next and what it all means. However, in a book full of abstractions, once in a while a concrete image breaks through, giving us "pigeons on the pavement," "a pillow [which] serves as tombstone," and "not dead flowers but papier-mache catching fire." Poet Richard Hugo, in The Triggering Town, reminds us, "Often, if the triggering subject is big (love, death, faith) rather than localized and finite, the mind tends to shrink." So, it is a welcome relief to find an echo of one of the great love poem masters, Theodore Roethke, who said he would gladly "suffer" himself "in another being at last." Here, Indemaio also writes, "I suffer my self" and evokes a Roethkean transformative quality in love when he declares, "In your winters I've trembled." If heavenly exaltation is celebration of beauty, truth, love and the "democracy of the imagination" (Richard Hugo), it only becomes so as the intimate devil in the details.

ELENA KARINA BYRNE (July 27, 2010)

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