



Farewell, My Lovelies

Diann Blakely

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Braided narratives, subtle shifts from mythical to modern times, complex allusions to both film noir and pop culture and social consciousness characterize this collection of poems. Braiding narratives is a stylistic device brought to literary attention by Bridget Peggeen Kelly's work in *Goat Song*. Blakely has mastered this technique and uses it to integrate the strands of her most fascinating pieces.

Her narratives move back and forth in time and focus, accumulating meaning by association. For example, in "Last Dance" she begins with one of ballet's most famous bad women, Giselle, but moves the story briskly through furies to free associations with Courtney Love and Kurt Cobain. This fresh replay of mythical motif against the "Transcendent fury / thumping loud..." of contemporary pop icons, makes for a wildly textured, but lush piece. Her poetry explores the connection of film, particularly film noir, with the distant and sometimes detached values that mark the end of the twentieth century.

In "Reunion Banquet, Class of '79," she creates a thick soup of images by juxtaposing cinematic titles against the moment of realizing one cannot, and perhaps should not, look too closely at the past. "The Deer Hunter. Most seated here are divorced, / and childless too. Lipstick. Who'll stop the rain? / I untie my knotted napkin, wanting out. It's late. / Women under the influence. Badlands."

As well as the surreal qualities of these poems, Blakely just as easily anchors her work in brutal reality and spiritual quandary. In her poem, "The Homeless in America," inspired by a photographic exhibit on that subject, she targets the harshest of American moments. A mother and child sleeping on the streets evolve into an urban pieta, "His hair's caked / and matted, still she tries to smooth it, / her cracked fingers sorting his miniature / dreadlocks and probably finding lice."

Blakely is a poet who drives one into the twenty-first century with an intelligent blast without letting go of the impact and implacability of history and the human story. Her work will please avid readers of poetry who are looking for a fresh, complex voice and sophisticated taste.

ANNE-MARIE OOMEN (January / February 2000)

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