ForeWord Reviews
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Fear After
Bea Litherland
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Bea Litherland captures the fluidity of emotion in her new collection of poetry, Fear After. The verses in the four-part work move from nostalgia to despair, from despair to hope, and finally, from hope to calm. The "fear" of the title poem represents only a small part of the territory explored here by Litherland. Recurring themes include time, ephemera, the depth of emotions, death, and the struggle to compose poetry.

Litherland draws inspiration for her free-verse poems from her diverse experiences. Her anthropology background results in trenchant observations about human behavior throughout the volume. Similarly, Litherland's adventures in Tibet, China, and Vietnam imbue some of her poems with reverence for these locales. She makes her destinations real for readers as she records the impressions and emotions of a visitor who doesn't comprehend everything about the Far East, but who appreciates these foreign lands.

The poet tells readers, "Please note, poetry can be silly or profound." In Fear After, Litherland creates one profound poem after another. She deepens her verse by making unique observations about common things. For example, she meditates on memory, past, and future by turning a drink in the fridge into a potent symbol of unappreciated time: "But who today might remember the milk, / Which in the past was drunk so the future could grow up?" Elsewhere, she asserts, "The stigma of nostalgia / Worships time." She describes calmness as "the ability to earn / A lack of anxiety / And a lack of excitement." These turns of phrase delight readers and cause them to enjoy these familiar concepts in new ways.

Litherland's profoundness also comes from her masterful use of personification and similes. By giving abstractions human traits, the author renders her poems more concrete and accessible to readers. Here, for example, the poet extols the virtues of zero while simultaneously personifying algebra: "Even the lowly zero / Which made the vicious circle closed, / Is just about to be considered / The greatest figure in algebra—the queen of the science world." In her eyes, despair becomes "a dark dame," and fear "wore a pearl necklace," while the maternal "blue sky of Cracow / Protectively looks down, / Taking care of all shadows." Whether the poet's clever similes concern objects or abstractions, these comparisons also tweak readers' worldview. A tote bag possesses "two fatigued handles, like ears." In another poem, she remarks

to a deceased loved one, “[I]t was as if you were a spirit of easiness / Carrying eternity along.”

The book is well organized, with clear links between sections and between the poems in each. The linguistic gems of this collection are wrapped in an alluring cover featuring gradations of gray and a black-and-white photo of an airplane. This photo illustrates perfectly the mystical world readers enter when they open this volume. Newcomers to poetry and old hands alike have nothing to fear from this collection.

Jill Allen