FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Feeling as a Foreign Language: The Good Strangeness of Poetry

Alice Fulton
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In this meaty, laudable collection of essays, Alice Fulton constructs a rich and multi-faceted investigation into some of the most fundamental and thus far neglected topics in post modern/twenty-first-century reading, writing and thinking of poetry. A professor of English at the University of Michigan, Fulton is the recipient of both the Guggenheim and MacArthur fellowships among other honors, and has published four volumes of poetry: Sensual Math, Powers of Congress, Palladium and Dance Script with Electric Ballerinas. From her Enlightening discussion on the exhausted debate between formal and free verse, to her call for a Dickinsonian lineage in American letters, Fulton's essays demand an immediate ear and a flexed tongue.

In a day when simple free verse is plentiful, and complex, sublime and "culturally incorrect" poetry is scarce, Fulton makes a call for new directives in poetry. From the New Critics school of literary thought comes the belief that there is no such thing as a "natural" speaking voice, that voice is subject to the economic, gendered, ethnic, racial, familial, religious and societal forces which influence the speaker. Rather than deny these subjective powers, Fulton asks that we acknowledge them, force the reader to acknowledge them and thereby destroy the power of their "normative" and "objective" hold. This new school of Poetry, fractal poetry, would mirror the new reality foraged by the scientific and mathematic discoveries of Neils Bohr and Karl Heisenberg, subjective reality.

Fractal poetry would aim at breaking down our illusions of objective reality creating a fragmented body of work that becomes increasingly detailed and complex as one "zooms in" on the text. "Fractal poetry….splices satiric and lyrical, elegiac and absurd lines without casting a unifying tonal veil over the melange."

In terms of the content of fractal poetry, Fulton sounds a long deserved cry for poetry that challenges our comfortable culture—poetry that is "culturally incorrect." Such a call is in response to the self-congratulating "politically incorrect" brouhaha that has undermined major movements for tolerance, equality and harmony with our planet. She calls forth a poetry of

“inconvenient knowledge” to broaden our consciousness by awakening our social conscience. Such a school of poetics would “honor the margins and illuminate the fringes—the quirky handmade rather than slickly mass-produced…”

In addition to her discussions of fractal poetry, Fulton’s reconstructive essay on the neglect of Emily Dickinson in literary academia is of particular interest. Fulton examines the myths of Dickinson’s life as well as the potential threat she poses to the status quo, questioning why this literary figure as been so vagrantly ignored. Also included are illuminating reviews of several “marginal” poets including Margaret Cavendish, Phyllis Janowitz, Michael Collier and Amy Clampitt.

Fulton’s highly textured language and complex original insights bring to light many shadowy topics in contemporary poetry. These essays will raise the roof and open the windows, whatever your school house of poetic thought. Recommended for mature students, writers and thinkers of poetry and anyone who seeks to use “the tongue as a muscle.”

Jennifer Sperry