FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Fence Above the Sea
Brigitte Byrd
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Today it often seems that a poem is a poem is a poem. Not so this haunting and hypnotic paean to loss, displacement, and the journey to self. Unlike most contemporary poets whose antecedents are either academics such as Lowell, Berryman, Plath, and Bishop, or the avant-garde such as Olson, Ginsburg, and Di Prima, this poet's rhythms and use of repetition echo the seminal language work of Gertrude Stein, as well as James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness monologues.

Considering that Byrd was born in Paris and lived there until 1988, the literary allusions one finds in her poems are no surprise. Through a deliberate use of repetition and simple phrasing, Byrd's poems create a psychological field that becomes supracharged by the end of the book, leading the reader to a deeper understanding of the process of acceptance and reconciliation. As Byrd pointedly says in "Extreme Injury," "Repetition in her work does not mean she does not know what she does."

Byrd knows perhaps too much about her subject of loss and estrangement, and her knowing and her search for understanding are the generative force within many of the poems. Like Sharon Olds's works, which mine the disruptive codependency of the father-daughter relationship, Byrd's poems explore the psychological terrain of abuse; but unlike Olds's language, which is loaded with specificity, Byrd's flattened, repetitive, generalized diction mirrors the disassociative mind more directly: "The father is buried in the ground under sand and gravel. There is tradition and it is cold. [] She covers her fear she enters her body and looks for the father and he is there and he always was."

Byrd's poems at times sound as if Molly Bloom were speaking, no longer ecstatic by the prospect of love, but more worldly, more jaded, a post-modern woman who has seen it all: "Eclipse memories burned in manuscripts embalm visions ebbed in ink fragment language / : fallible shade fallible lips fallible smile fallible features fallible time fallible repetitions // galvanize disillusions embellish devious minds girdled in burned memories. ECLIPSE!"

Currently a Visiting Instructor at Florida State University, Byrd writes of her work,

“Inevitably, my writing is about the function of language in the constitution of the nature of reality and the nature of the individual and most certainly, my own nature, which is to be decontextualized.” By using prose poems, sparse punctuation, a flattened diction and tone, repetition, and reiteration, Byrd decontextualizes the narrative structure inherent in the lyric poem and gives a montaged, collaged staccato word-scape akin to Rauschenberg’s multi-media assemblages.

By being brought up short in relationship to one’s assumptions of what a poem should do, the reader is given fresh insights into well-trodden terrain. Byrd lulls the reader into an atonic disharmonic state where words, though the medium, become seemingly transparent since, as the poet writes in “Georgian Permutation with Water,” “there is only music when the words have left.”

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