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Fictional Teeth

Linda Dyer
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Just as teeth are an important, yet dispensable, tool among the survival skills that humankind still applies to life, so is literature, especially in its traditional forms of poetry and fiction. This book metaphorically alludes to one of the most essential aims of the art of the word as a therapeutic mean.

Dyer, who lives in San Francisco, makes her debut with this tight book of poems, divided into three parts, in which she modulates the tone of the voice and the form of the poem toward several effects. The lens through which situations are presented and discussed is that of crisp, dry irony. The three parts at first do not present inherent reasons; yet, after a second glance, one notices the increased obsession with a discreet discourse on the body and on the threats that affect it ("Breasts: the Empirical Data," "Makeshift Chemistry," "The Lost Finger").

The metaphor of the book's title may be explained by referring to the first lines of the first two stanzas of the opening poem, "Ledger of Lost Receipts": "Teeth, fallen out, cleaned off, kept / by her aunt in a velvet ring box; / [?] // Lost verses to the melody she sang, unrecognized." This metaphoric message is reinforced in poems such as "My Mother Sends a Picture of Her New Teeth."

The first poem is also one of many that may be read as a short story in verse. Some of the poems, in fact, develop a fine series of sketches around a motif, which is in turn shaped in momentous stories. This strategy would be enough to highlight the fictional aspect of the poems. An interesting experiment in this respect is developed in several prose poems.

Fiction, then, is the essence of Dyer's poetry; it is the ingredient that sustains a voice that leaves no room for sentimentality, even when a love motif emerges in the vicissitudes of the body of poetry. Fiction also ensures that these poems maintain a level of self-awareness that hints at the poet's sophisticated style.
(September / October 2001)

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