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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ POETRY

From a Train Window: Two Faces of Evy

Evelyn Cole
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There are two sides to every coin, and a writer's inner and outer worlds are both separate and intertwined. This dual reality is evident in Evelyn Cole's poetry collection *From a Train Window: Two Faces of Evy*. Divided into five sections, the poems discuss public and personal worlds and the universal emotions of anger and love. Cole examines the sometimes "heavy metal rhythm" of the world: poems about small joys, quirky rants, and philosophical insight are layered with pieces examining war, heartbreak, and death.

Some of the poems in this collection will strike the reader with their "take no prisoners" approach to honesty. The title of the prose poem "Loneliness" is deceptively simple, with the opening introducing a "thick-lipped boy" whose grunts are met with "jeers and groans" of his classmates. This alienated and awkward young man has the last laugh, however, when the final section of the poem gives him a voice: Discussing metaphor, he says, "Loneliness … is committing suicide without a note." The silence that hangs in his classroom extends past the page to the reader. Cole shines a spotlight close to the heart of the matter and does not shy away from the guts and dirt of the human condition.

Her poems vary in line length and form. Often, the action of the poem dictates the pacing and body of the piece. "Too Much Yang for a Girl" chronicles a speaker who was "born with tom boy juice." The short lines mimic the action of the poem: "a ball bouncing off of a garage door" and "ping pong over the garage." This command of the line builds a quick pace so that the reader isn't as shocked as the speaker is when she discovers and welcomes the "missing yang."

Some poems ring too loudly. "Wet Valentine" is full of great action describing a love that is like the ocean. Rich language explains how the relationship is "scraping the heart" and "softens, smoothes, and polishes." However, the last line pushes the poem over the edge into sentimentality: "And it's eye-stinging, head-clearing, butt-kicking gorgeous!" Conversely, more restraint is found in poems like "Lament for Twice Lost Love." Here, the final line explaining the love is concise and more subtle: "My guts wear his jeans." The wordplay does not explain the speaker's emotions, but the strangeness of the line strongly connects the reader to a sharp heartbreak.

The playful tone of the poems makes key comparisons more striking. For example, when discussing sin, the poet explains how politicians telling the truth would be "original / and a political sin." Such wordplay and tongue-in-cheek humor make the political and social statements of the collection that much sharper.

The geography of *From a Train Window* is vast: from the farmer's market to beef sweetbreads, no subject is untouched. Each poem is a journey, as readers begin in one place and follow the twists and turns into sometimes surprising territory.

LISA BOWER (November 2, 2011)

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