

Living Must Bury

Josie Sigler

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Haunting and cryptic, Josie Sigler's debut collection of linked poems reads like a lyric accounting of violence. Comprised of shapely, often coupleted lines, this book is like one long feral female howl. Her poems are the sound words make when repetition, alliteration, assonance, and irreverent rhymes mate with the tragedies of our fleshly world. Reading on, into the music, we gradually find our bearings though we may not know where we are.

"I'm saying the neighbor opened his wife's neck. And something / came fluttering into me, into my chest, some alphabet about how to hold // a secret, write it down so no one would recognize the flap of skin," she writes.

Sigler is a chronicler of hurts: her own and those of history; of forgotten places; of unremembered victims. This is how she makes sense of things which very often have so sense. Employing the principles of collage, she borrows heavily from popular and obscure references, stirring a mash of the vulgar and the sublime; fragments of Sappho and Dickinson; accounts of Iraqi war dead. She writes about Holocaust chemicals and a man who cares for birds maimed and mangled in freak accidents; seemingly, this is her way of putting all of this to some kind of rest. The concept for her gesture presumably arose from a line by Sylvia Plath that appears at the beginning of the book: "I shall bury the wounded like pupas / I shall count and bury the dead."

Her poems will be a challenge to many readers of poetry but they press us to listen, take what is given without any "irritable reaching after fact or reason." Read as a complete volume, they present themselves as a considerable feat of the imagination, threaded with odd syntax, throbbing with a pained beauty

"Those who long for ritual, for couplets. Those invincible. Those who / strip their clothes in the hills to wander a mountain lions killing path // where each buffalo is more decayed than the last I walk to my death, / bitten by flies. Crouch, remove *costae fluitantes*, that which floats," Sigler writes.

These poems are in love with sound and rhythm, and they carry their burden over distances, full of momentum. Sigler is a fetishist of words and their definitions and she uses etymologies, dictionary citations, and archaic terms throughout this book. It's demanding but worthwhile work to consult her extensive endnotes in order to piece together this uncommon poetic project.

HOLLY WREN SPAULDING (April 15, 2010)

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