FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Notes for a Late-Blooming Martyr (Akron Series in Poetry)
Marlys West
University of Akron Press The
978-1-884836-55-8
(September 30, 1999)

The ability to maintain hope in the midst of darkness is a kind of grace. West's vers libre poems are dark and disturbing, but they are ripe with this grace—hopeful, humorous, strong.

In "Silky Turnpike," a family is driving in a car:

I sit in the backseat on my knees,
arms around my father's neck.
He's a lemon-scented cigarette.
When I grow up, I'll be your
girlfriend.

The speaker's mother admonishes her, and the girl imagines her future:

Someday I'll be forty-seven.
I better pull myself together.
I think I'll need a husband or two … .
I take it all back with me. Bonjour,
New Jersey, you fat doll's arm.

The poems explore several tender subjects: strained marriages, embarrassingly awkward adolescence, madness, religious fervor, suicide and death. The language throughout is surprising, jarring, even gruesome.

In "Filters out Twigs and Sticks" the speaker imagines illness emanating from the radio and asks:

Is everybody playing sick?
Also of interest: a girl who peeled
back the skin of her arms, oh razor.
Not to worry, she said. All clear.
Just checking, she said. Just
checking for what the hell? I said.

The volume is woven through with a thread of recurring images: knives, breadcrumbs,

whirling planets, uncles, white flowers.

"Attar of Roses" describes a man's near-death experience:

He was shedding red flowers with every
exhale. The bed spilled bent tulips
over everyone's shoes.
He told his family he was ungodly tired … .
And someone sewed him up like a good
wool coat; then he was strong again.
He sat up in bed and looked us over.
Flowers sifted to the bedroom floor.

This work is not for the faint-hearted, but those who can squint into the dark will find in these poems an uncommon, glowing beauty.

Karen McCarthy