ForeWord Reviews

SHORT STORIES

Quickening
Liza Wieland
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Writers of the best fiction place messages in their work, often cryptic and difficult to comprehend. Liza Wieland is one of those writers: her descriptions are filled with potent symbolism and her carefully crafted words deliver a powerful emotional punch without being melodramatic.

Quickening is a collection of twelve stories divided into four themed parts that open with a short preliminary piece, setting the atmosphere in each section. The author's locales are varied—Paris, New York, Venice, even the horrendous site of a Nazi massacre in Oradour, France. Reaching back into the chronicles of history for more than just fascinating characters, including the controversial writer Ezra Pound, she creates a world that is relevant to the present by relating fictional actions within a believable, present-day context.

Wieland's ability to mix the real with the unreal lends an eerie authenticity to imaginative scenarios that revive some vital truth or forgotten sentiment extinguished long ago. Her use of current events, such as the impact of military maneuvers on returning soldiers, a tragic airline bombing, and a teen pregnancy pact, help to create that impression. In Quickening, she also explores the negative and positive realms of domestic relationships through memories of a first marriage and love for a mother: "I stand outside under the moonlight. I see the front door to my house, a hundred yards east, the magenta-colored calla lilies on the steps, the impatiens glowing like neon, the petunia covered in small purple trumpets. You must make my mother leave L.A., I say to the moon."

A resident of Arapahoe, North Carolina, Liza Wieland is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. This two-time winner of the Pushcart Prize has published three novels: A Watch of Nightingales, which received the Michigan Literary Fiction Award, The Names of the Lost, and Bombshell, as well as a book of poetry, Near Alcatraz. Quickening was preceded by two earlier short-story collections, You Can Sleep While I Drive and Discovering America. She teaches literature and creative writing at Eastern Carolina University in Greenville.

This gifted author imposes a jarring realism on dramatizations that play out with understatement and sophistication. Her best work in this volume is consistently subject to interpretation, leaving a veil of mysticism partially clothing every effort.

Julia Ann Charpentier