

Refugia: Poems

Kyce Bello

University of Nevada Press (Sep 4, 2019)

Softcover \$14.95 (96pp)

978-1-948908-34-4

A refugia is a place where organisms can survive because they are protected in some way from the surrounding inhospitable environment; climate change has rendered the earth one such “flaming wreck.” Quietly political, the book’s poems explore the impact of global warming, devoting particular attention to the rapid death of conifer trees and to the wildfires that plague northern New Mexico, poet Kyce Bello’s home.

Moving between considering DNA and the scorched earth, Bello’s poems seek to understand lineage, aftermaths, and the impact of shared traumas upon families and the environment. Poems find slivers of beauty among ashes:

even when the remains have transfigured into their own

unexpected beauty, even if, in the morning

*she will be ready to love whatever
ruin they have become.*

The unexpected glory of such work is its capacity for loving what’s destroyed or seemingly ruined.

Poems are often written in couplets or tercets that impose order on their subjects, which are often of the disordered world. Loving, unsparing visions of Bello’s native and family environments make *Refugia* both a lament and a song of praise. The poems are arranged in a direct way and are rife with detail, their lines both visceral and accessible.

Moving across seasons and chronicling the inevitable bloom and decay of each, poems impart reverence toward nature, capturing a dusty river that’s dwindled to a trickle, or a bird flying that’s seen as a communication from the earth. The natural and made worlds intersect; speakers act as conduits between the past, present, and future.

Poems mourn the land that was and cherish what may still be. Motherhood plays a key role, figured in as a place of refuge where creation and demolition happen over and over again, with wombs sustaining life, then going dormant again, but always with the possibility for renewal.

Refugia forges powerful links between motherhood and the land, sustenance and destruction.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (September / October 2019)

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