ForeWord Reviews

Resin
Geri Doran
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This is an appropriate poet to carry on the tradition of Walt Whitman. The poems in this first collection may not contain "barbaric yawps," but they certainly speak authoritatively. In "Self-Portrait as Miranda," the speaker claims, "Frequently, *de profundis*, we struggle ashore // to find ourselves, if not stranded, then beached. / We are inclined to be grateful for land." Despite this evocation of William Shakespeare (via *The Tempest*), Doran is a true descendant of Whitman; that is, she is an American poet.

Since Doran is the recipient of the 2004 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, and since her poems have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic*, and *New England Review*, her poetic skill comes as no surprise. Her poems, on the other hand, are full of surprises. In the twenty-six poems of *Resin*, Doran explores a variety of forms, alternating between short and long lines as well as between short and long poems. She plays with formal and informal styles, keeping her readers not only alert, but eager for the next twist of insight or language.

Doran incorporates various American vernaculars in this collection, including her own Midwestern flair. Each voice patiently waits its turn, and instead of babble, Doran produces a harmonizing choir. In "Blue Moon," she writes, "Let me say exactly what happened: / over sunnysides up you crooned / *I won't wrack the end with clichés, / there's nothing can be done.*" The musicality of such lines is soothing despite the bleak but aptly bluesy subject matter of a woman receiving heartbreak. Doran is not afraid to tackle less musical topics such as asylums, fires, and wars, and she does so by focusing on the humans involved.

The tragedies that this poet evokes are sometimes American, but also belong to Chechnya, the banks of the Nile, and the intangible poetic space of the universal. Like most memorable poets, Doran strives to communicate truth in her work. The result is a Whitman-esque all-embracing gesture. She embraces a beloved, as well as lunatics, victims, literary characters, and many others. As resin is secreted from a pine tree, Doran's poems spring naturally from these poetic subjects.

The energy produced by such a project is impressive and fitting for a poet fresh out of the gate. *Resin* is indeed a debut collection, but there is little suspicion of its success being

beginner’s luck. Behind these words lies an assured hand, willing to bear the daunting association of Whitman and the sanction of Henri Cole, this year’s competition judge at the Academy of American Poets.

Erica Wright