



She and I: A Fugue

Michael R. Brown

Petrarca Press (March 2009)

Hardcover \$26.95 (283pp)

978-0-9820402-0-1

A fugue is a musical term for a style of composition written in a fixed number of parts or “voices.” Here in Michael Brown's *She and I: A Fugue* the author employs a multitude of lyrical techniques such as line breaks rhythm and figurative speech to create a memoir that reads like verse but has all the narrative elements of creative nonfiction. The result is that each of his experiences is told in its own voice.

This is a memoir centered on one man's life experiences with women beginning with his mother and grandmother and continuing to the romantic relationships of his adult life; each relationship has importance and significance and he says in the early pages “women were big presences. They raised me.” Told in episodes of varying length the memoir is divided into five parts with each part further divided into chapters with their own segmented narratives. The writing at the sentence level is devoid of any unnecessary language and sentences often omit articles modifiers and pronouns. In a simple description of a young girl nursing her fingers which had just been smashed in a window the author says: “She had them to lips.”

Additionally Brown uses other poetic elements such as line breaks and regular patterns of rhythm to describe his experiences and breathe life into them. In chapter two he writes: “A shock. / The lights grew brighter. / I stopped walking without realizing. / I did not move or breathe.” Such stripped down syntax and the lyrical employment of speech makes for a complexly intricate composition which enhances the memoir's theme of moving away from convention and toward a unique life.

Of course such stylized writing and poetic language may make the writing somewhat inaccessible for some readers; and at times Brown seems to intentionally structure his narrative with abstractions and deviations from convention and the reader may feel lost or left out of the story. However such intricacy with language is ultimately artful and moving and the effect of such lyrical writing will not be lost on most readers. This is a memoir that is able to draw from both poetic and narrative elements blending language and metaphor with story into a tapestry that reads with the clarity of a story but with the lyricism of a poem. The effect is musical.

JESSICA HIGGINS (January 22, 2009)

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