FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Autobiography & Memoir

Sinner of Memory
Melita Schaum
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This series of essays is characterized by a deeply haunting and sometimes melancholic tone that both mesmerizes and intrigues. The author's vision of memory is marked by the juxtaposition of image against quiet action, and in so doing, her writing nods more to the great lyric poets than to the essayists. That the book is ultimately about love and how it works in one's middle years—as well as how people both fail at it and accept its limitations—calls up yet another reason for comparison to the lyrical vision.

The collection begins in Paris and ends in an oncology ward as the speaker of these essays prepares for a biopsy that will remove what may or may not be a cancerous tumor. The doctors can't tell until they remove it. That action—removing something to examine it for its truth—may be the key to this collection. Schaum, and the reader with her, must remove parts of her life to look at them closely enough to understand now what she didn't understand then. In Schaum's prose, the process is both fascinating and intense. Even with memory laid out like a patient, she most often finds understanding through the poet's device, metaphor. For example, in "Preservation: A Story," while on a sometimes dangerous vacation with her sister, she uses various means of preservation to structure and explore memories—both ironic and particular—that keep her alive and "preserve" her life.

Schaum is the author of several books, on the modern poet Wallace Stevens and on women's issues, including *Gender Images: Reading for Composition*. She has received the Dorothy Cappon Churchill Award in Creative Nonfiction and the New Millennium Writings Prize in Literary Essay, and was named William A. Rainey Scholar in Creative Nonfiction at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.

Here, her strongest piece, "Epithalamion," explores deeply the decision to love and marry for the first time in her middle years. In this essay, readers are invited to both worry and rejoice in her awkward and authentic choices about this late love. As in all good nonfiction,

readers are allowed to see themselves as they might have been, to connect with the potential of their lives through the thoughtful and honest self-exploration of another. Early in the book, Schaum writes, “I think our lives come up at us sometimes in fragments, inexplicably. There we are. There it is.” In this statement she captures both her approach for writing this very real and lyrical memoir and the way she will understand her life and connect with her readers. “There we are. There it is.”

Anne-Marie Oomen