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Small Gods of Grief (American Poets Continuum)

Laure-Anne Bosselaar
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The author's first book of

poems, Artemis, was written in her native Flemish and published in Europe. She moved to the U.S. some dozen years ago; her command of the language and depth of understanding for the nuance, rhythms, and irony of the "American" tongue feels as natural and expert as our finest writers. Here, in her third book of poems (winner of the Isabella Gardner Award), is a voice that explores and honors the terrifying and melancholic backdrop of childhood in post-war Europe, as well as the cynicism and beauty of the American urban landscape, to build poems of aesthetic quality and technical authority.

Bosselaar's work often explores the role of "the disposable camera of memory" on the psyche and shows, first, the tensions between that memory and the present, and then-and this is what a lesser poet would not have accomplished-moves the poem toward understanding and transformation. Her poems excavate the territory of abuse, dysfunctional family relations, and the futility of looking at the personal without the context of the political, as in *Voting Tongue*: "In France, Germany, Israel- / Israel too-votes speak menacing / tongues and millions // pretend they don't hear it. And I / write about a lemon slice in my tea?"

Technically she captivates through the use of strong verbs and nouns that move forward in ever-evolving kinetic lists as accessible as they are energetic. "Scarves, cowls, coats, gloves. we slip / the licorice twigs in our pockets. Warm / our hands one last time by the stove, open / the door to a wind sharp as nettles. / Door-latch. Gate. Gate-latch." In addition, she is master of an invented form that supports the vitality of her language. In many poems, her stanzas mimic the paragraph, complete with indented first line, and each set of lines encapsulates a specific forward motion in the poem. In other pieces, she celebrates the short poem, a handful of short lines exploding with insight.

It is this blend of sure technical expertise, socially conscious storytelling, and a deeply lyrical perspective that will grab the reader. For those who get hooked, look also at her previous book of poems, The Hour between Dog and Wolf, and especially at one of the finest poems of the decade, "Little Sisters of Love and Misery."
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