

Swimming in the Rain: New and Selected Poems 1980-2015

Chana Bloch

Autumn House Press (Jan 1, 2015)

Softcover \$19.95 (220pp)

978-1-938769-00-9

Each of Bloch's poems tells a story filled with history and depth, inviting the audience to watch each enlightened moment unfold on the page.

Award winning poet and translator Chana Bloch's latest collection of poems, *Swimming in the Rain: New and Selected Poems*, does not disappoint. With a strong mothering nudge, Bloch ushers us toward a deeper understanding of what is passed between generations. The collection spans from 1980 to 2015 and provides an exquisite overview of the poet's cumulative power.

Although the themes have changed, Bloch's musical style has remained consistent throughout her career. Her subtle rhythms never hesitate, and they resemble a heartbreaking lullaby filled with deep nostalgia, joy, and the inevitable acceptance of suffering.

Her poems, while controlled in their language, whirl and spasm toward their search for understanding. They feel immediate. One of Bloch's greatest strengths is her elegant endings. Her poems conclude with the sound of a stone being laid on a tomb, the thump of a last heartbeat.

Bloch's stark images pull apart from the plainspoken language in her poems. In "Twenty-fourth Anniversary," she begins by writing, "I hung my wedding dress / in the attic," and ends the poem with the lines "Pillars forget they used to be / tree trunks, their sap congealed // into staying put. I can feel it / happening in every cell—that gradual / cooling and drying." She uses her unusual images in masterful ways to convey meaning; in this case, emphasizing the unmoving desperation at the end of a long marriage.

Occasionally, Bloch's poems contain sweeping and unexpected turns that feel like a punch in the gut. In "Rehearsal," she describes a statue in the park and states, "From his horse / he watches the cars plunging toward the tunnel, / three hooves stuck in cement." The next line stands alone after a stark stanza break: "I'm practicing to leave you."

Looking at sorrow squarely in the eye, Bloch digs into the dark corners of poverty, mental illness, and child rearing and does not falter. She blazes forth with bold honesty and integrity. She is able to hold everything and withhold nothing.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (Spring 2015)

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