

ForeWord Reviews

ESSAYS

Syzygy, Beauty: An Essay

T. Fleischmann

Sarabande Books

978-1-936747-26-9

(April 2012)

In a fleeting moment, Fleischmann declares, “I am going to have thousands of loves, and each will have a ghost of me.” Colliding memory, romance, self-awareness, and loss with pithy lightness and seriousness all at once, and composed in poetic fragments that range from a paragraph to a few sentences, this distinctive debut traces “the past made alight by impact” through a diverse set of sources: film and carpentry analogies; interior monologues; references to artists Méret Oppenheim, Man Ray, Grayson Perry, and Louise Bourgeois; gnostic texts; and personal, yet ambiguous, disclosures. Fleischmann’s cultured world is inhabited by an “I” whose “valiant insecurities” draw readers into the tale of a young trio: “you,” “your boyfriend,” and the speaker, partners who cannot transcend emotional distances despite their ardor.

An editor of the literary journal *DIAGRAM*, Fleischmann muses on beauty and longing by forming delicate verbal collages. Objects including glass orbs and butterflies find a place alongside images such as copper and gold lamé. A house under construction becomes a metaphor for lives in progress. Most sections in the book can be contemplated on their own, and they evoke mysteries within the everyday: “Scratched film. Lit scrim. A forest is nothing but thousands of trees blocking each other from our view. Something to sleep under. Imperfect as bark.”

Connections and disconnections recur throughout, emphasizing how one's hold over another can be welcomed even if it is painstaking. As Fleischmann circles through memories, the beloved is idealized and simultaneously characterized by minute quirks and habits. There is no strictly linear underpinning to the story of the relationships; the author allows space to imagine what is left unsaid and what has happened before and after each instance. Reflection quickly becomes a form of tribute. The book's themes beautifully converge when Fleischmann writes, "It is only by being imperfect and beautiful, imperfect and holy, imperfect and us that anything can be complete." Recommended for readers who are intrigued by prose poems, poetic prose, lyrical essays, and the sometimes indefinable boundaries between them, this book is unmistakably a feast for the eye and mind.

Karen Rigby