FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Terrain Vague
Richard Meier
Verse Press
978-0-9703672-1-1
(November 27, 2000)

"I can't say I'm sorry, / you who are to me both sun and moon." The book's backbone seems simple: a relationship between a man and a woman. It begins with one of many references to Greek mythology wherein the speaker identifies his lover with Aeneas and himself with Dido, the wronged and deserted female, in a gender reversal typical of this book. Meier further complicates the myth because this Aeneas does not leave, instead she creates a mental, if not literal, distance between herself and the narrator. Meier writes of her "conflicted Aeneas, cyclic stone, constant sea, / make of your back, unbroken flesh, a queer commitment, / that absence embodied is different, / that its shifts aren't loss."

Though the ostensible identification of the conflicted character targets the woman, the protagonist finds himself equally enthralled and repelled by his antagonist and partner through a series of diurnal defeats: infidelity, apathy, desire, uncertainty. This uncertainty creates the dichotomy at the heart of the book. Like Eugenio Montale before him, Meier creates a language specific to himself and his love, and both poets explore the dark side of their love affairs: for Montale, it was death; for Meier, it is the drifting between reality and his expectations for his reality. In "Nonplussed," he writes:

A cavity can lure
its opposite, fulfillment, and if the flash
flood were the canyon
we had hope to be delivered, dead belly
of the whale alive with fishes, or a God
who chased, thus to replace, replenished us?

Again, in this poem, the poet explores the dynamic between he and his partner, a dynamic that compels because it is bitter and wistful, utterly contradictory in the same moment, a trait that characterizes not only his familial relationships but also his relation to writing.

"I want to say it straightest / the line involves the curve and beds / distortion. Best, better to remind me." With these lines, Meier states, in "Dear, Reader" what is arguably the ars poetica

of the book: his desire for the simple statement and the reality of his daily tangents.

The poems are dense and imagistic, at times almost surreal, and they pulse down the page with an urgency of both narrative and rhythm. Meier packs his poems tightly, and they often require the intense concentration and reflection of a Wallace Stevens poem. They are also consistently worth the effort of unpacking.

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