



The Fragile Peace You Keep

Kel Munger

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Kel Munger is not at all the typical “Career Poet,” comfortably ensconced in some cushy office teaching creative writing. The poems in her first book clearly emerge from a range of blue-collar experience-as waitress, police dispatcher, baker. Carl Sandburg, with his working-class sympathies and esthetic, is Munger’s unlikely father figure.

The dilemmas and traumas of such lives fuel her work, sometimes given tension by contrast, as in the wonderful “The 911-Dispatcher Reads Boethius on Duty”: “Here, / in this hungry country of unkindness, I have become / an unwilling philosopher, a professional.”

“What Cops Don’t Know” is equally pithy, with its balance of admiration for an officer’s skill, and distress at his prejudice. After a list of the cop’s feats, it ends as he “shakes his head violently”: “I can’t stand queers! he says, and takes a seat / at the briefing table, right next to me.”

Munger’s lesbianism informs many of these poems, perhaps an authentic factor in her sympathy for the underdogs and victims of the world.

JEFF GUNDY (September / October 1998)

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