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The Line

Jennifer Moxley
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The mostly brief prose poems that make up Jennifer Moxley's fourth book of poetry locate themselves immediately in what must now, oddly, be described as the experimental tradition. The epigraph (untranslated) is from Rimbaud's "Youth," and the first poem of *The Line* echoes Rimbaud's claim that memory and the senses will be "only the nourishment of your creative impulse." It also establishes a diction that is by turns abstract and suddenly concrete: "The sedative present, tugging, sucking, and many-voiced … . Under your right arm, a memory crutch, under your left, the future …"

Time is a key problem in these poems, as is the struggle to articulate the inner experience of the "you" who functions as their main character. While Moxley clearly owes a debt to the Language poets of the seventies and eighties, and to a whole range of poets working in innovative and non-narrative modes over the past century, the underlying lucidity of her work makes it surprisingly accessible. There is indeed considerable narrative in these poems—oblique and compressed as it may be—and flashes of wit as well: "Against the backdrop of your solitude the contentment of others repels you… . With no new experience to feed it your amulet mind seeks asylum in imaginary visions of a falsified past."

Moxley, a California native who now teaches at the University of Maine, carries on the Language poets' political interests, and both national and gender politics are significant though subtle threads in this collection: "Someone performs an amputation to tie the resources up. Your children are threatened not by a system but by a single unethical man." Even more often, the ongoing inner and outer problems and perplexities of contemporary life enter in surprising yet compelling ways: "Morning after morning while you lay sweatily wedged between weary physicality and tedious selfhood the punctilious programs of the already dead tromp heavily through your mind."

Sometimes dreamlike, sometimes more like rather eccentric little essays or even strangely indirect confessions, the poems in this book sustain a remarkable energy over its rather brief curve. Writing like Moxley's requires some patience; she rarely offers up immediately recognizable anecdotes or neat, modest epiphanies. But those willing to spend a bit of time with these ambitious, playful, and often eloquent linguistic and psychological explorations will find the rewards plentiful.

JEFF GUNDY (June 7, 2007)

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