



The Whole Marie

Barbara Maloutas

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“While I am in the studio making these corrections my husband is out on the / lawn fixing the sprinkler heads that one of the dogs bit off during *its* long days in / the yard between the house and our studio. If I don’t use *its* someone may think / that my husband has taken to biting off sprinkler heads. He’s not there yet.” In the preceding lines Barbara Maloutas exemplifies the best qualities of her collection *The Whole Marie*: playful beautifully crafted and intensely aware of both the sight of words on paper and their audible sound. Indeed the reader can almost be convinced of a smirk inherent in Maloutas’ more narrative pieces perhaps even more so in the disjointed and oddly lineated works that comprise the other half of this collection.

Maloutas creates a highly evocative sensory world where repetition changes the meaning of the most basic statements makes them new again and odd left ringing in the reader’s ear. “love painting and eyeyeseye / simple mention of eyelids and eyebrows lovely space / waitthe confounding I in soundenvisions / you’ll go blind” from the poem “Tuesday October 22” is a delight to read aloud where Maloutas’ deft use of the repetitive brings about entendre and invites the reader to join in the sheer joy of language play.

At times the creative lineation and spacing of Maloutas’ works becomes nearly confusing forcing readers to slow their pace and be patient with the words in front of them. She seems most at ease and effective in her more prosaic works fusing the everyday with language play occasionally deviating from her lighter tones to invoke what feels nearly like a kind of judgment as in her poem “When I Read”: “I can’t have a row of / women screaming that I am wrong or that I haven’t done this or that. If he goes / ahead with his plan I will have to slink out in the dead of night with a hatchet / to cut them down.” With vignettes ranging from the household to the holy monasteries of the orthodox Maloutas brings to each piece an accuracy conjoined with obfuscation as though sooner or later a secret will suddenly appear a watermark to the reader tantalizing them with the opportunity to explore again what had nearly become familiar. Ultimately Maloutas’ deconstruction becomes a kind of reconstruction where definitions share what had been until her poems’ arrivals empty beds a place where “eventually she / tried to remember what down meant and sit and beg and heel. After many years / she became a very famous hermit and human seekers came wanting to be her / followers. They did what she did for she said nothing.”

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