

Clarion Review ★★★★★

POETRY

Time Peels All to Original White: Xueyan Poems

Xueyan

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Inventive, beautiful, and deep, the poems of Time Peels All to Original White muse on subjects of perennial relevance in fresh, literary ways.

Xueyan's exceptional poetry collection *Time Peels All to Original White* combines brilliant imagery with graceful structures and original ideas.

With poems that are both imaginative and erudite, this book encompasses questions of perennial concern. It often dissects such questions in modern settings and with contemporary language. Its topics include the nature of God, the existence of evil, the brutality of capitalism, the loneliness of existence, and the reach of human love. Each entry is brief; some are composed of just a few lines. Each word counts in these poems, including their titles, which are often essential to comprehension. Still, entire worlds exist in these jewel boxes because of their precise linguistic turns, clever line breaks, and uses of alliteration and assonance.

Astonishing juxtapositions result in compelling arguments for a cosmopolitan world view. In the three-line entry "Office Building," "Living corpses sit and stare / Company epitaph is composed of their names." And in intellectually pleasing entries concerned with the human condition, paradoxes and irony expose people's frailty, as with the irony of the human drive for conquest that comes into sharp relief in "Big Small":

*Even if I have conquered the whole world
after death
my body will rest in only one tiny plot.*

In other entries, a more visceral kind of pleasure is available. There are startling and impactful images present throughout: in "Color of Sin," "Eve bites the apple / It begins to oxidize." It's a singular take on a familiar scene, operating in an organic fashion within the entry's concise, balanced form.

While elements of Buddhism and classical mythology inform some entries, most of the poems that are concerned with the nature of God are framed in a structure of Christian imagery and biblical traditions. This is accomplished with reverence, impudence, or both, revealing the complexity of belief. Human sensuality competes with faith for primacy in poems where "Flesh entangles / the two planks of a cross / our bodies nailed / bleeding yet blazing," reversing the usual hierarchy of spirit over flesh. Here, there is room for both desire and holiness. Vigorous lines take on the power of God by claiming the identity of "fire / fire / fire / the waving skirt of Joan of Arc / the thorny crown of Jesus Christ."

Inventive, beautiful, and deep, the poems of *Time Peels All to Original White* beg to be read again and again.

MICHELE SHARPE (September 19, 2022)

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