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REVIEWS

/ VI KHI NAO /

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Poetry Review

Streets As Elsewhere

by JL Jacobs

Norman, OK: Mongrel Empire Press, 2014

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The old copper pipes that heat the apartment are rattling as I read these quietly incisive and transient JL Jacobs' words, fraying with beauty, clarity, death, emmenagogues, and violence. There is snow everywhere. Bitter cold comes and goes. In my grief of C.D., I sought other forms of grief. I see that C.D. Wright before she passed away had blurbed this beautiful book and there is splendor in knowing someone else through someone else.

These Jacobs' poems, tenacious and un-rasping, moving along in their burial space arrive to us like 'liquid arrows', nailing our memories to wind, seeking solace in concrete ephemerality. Hair and rain, one is a river and still and the other also a river, falling not still, shape the insistent atmosphere of this Jacobs' poetic semi-minimalism. But the engine that drives this collection into its birth is also birth and midwifing and intermittent violence and the quotidian gestures in brevity from the natural world. In her poem, "Certitude," Jacobs provides insights on how long it has taken her to usher this collection into our light. Jacobs writes, "Here is a reverse. We take of gales/ and a landscape of driving rain./It is the tangled white hair of two decades/ (definition)." For twenty years, these hush-less, compulsory, seemingly barren poems are formed from Jacobs' collage of economical insights and and her grandmotherly doula-ish world. The texture of this poem and the feelings they provoke, marked by astringent and heartfelt restraints, are antediluvian in their monolithic nature, but also reductive in their unceremonious manifestation. These poems remind me of charcoal or white chalk drawings on Stonehenge paper, where a naked tree, maybe a root doctor too, stands alone in an abandoned landscape. A leaf or two breaking apart from the branch and something waiting, wailing to happen or not happen. Sometimes violence arrives and at other times, beauty dressed in her most marginal gown: "I send you this telegram,/ this sketch of a woman/ cobalt-blue."

There are other raw fierceness existing here amongst the 'deluded shoreline' (p. 75), "And our bodies also in the half-light. Or, there may have been: leaves full of voices/ an upturned nipple," but my favorite poem from this collection lies tangled in the intimate space of the monthly weather. The poem's title, "August and Rain," showed two women, August and Rain, pressed "against one another/in this narrow bed" of life. These two women don't come together very often, sometimes only in the month of August. Latexed by a "face thrown into evening/ moving in too small rooms," for years to come these poems will continue to make us ache for things we could only find on JL Jacob's monograph of words as they dance in the rain outside the sphere of the real and unreal.



Vi Khi Nao was born in Long Khanh, Vietnam. She is the author, most recently, *Umbilical Hospital*, a collection of the short stories, *A Brief Alphabet Torture*, which won FC2's Ronald Suken Innovative Fiction Prize in 2016 and, the novel, *F. in Exile* (Coffee House Press, 2016). She has also published a poetry collection, *The Old Philosoph* which won the Nightboat Books Prize for Poetry 2014. She holds an MFA in fiction from Brooklyn University, where she received the John Hawk and Feldman Prizes in fiction and the Kim A Arstark Memorial Award in poetry.