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on Patricia Goedicke

Bette Thiebes

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CutBank 25 Reviews:

Patricia Goedicke, *The Wind of Our Going*;
Copper Canyon Press; Port Townsend, WA;
\$8.00

*Eternity is in love with
the productions of time.* William Blake

Patricia Goedicke's new book, *The Wind of Our Going*, begins with a poem-prelude entitled "For All the Sad Rain." It is a warning to all who would proceed:

Do you think I haven't been stepped on by giants?
Do you think my teachers didn't stand me in a corner
For breathing, do you think my own father didn't burn me
With the wrath of a blast furnace for wanting to sit on his knee?

To speak threatens the fixed order and defies chaos. To act is to suffer and heal. Care must be taken in listening or the right to be heard is jeopardized.

The *Wind of Our Going* is divided into three remaining sections: I. "The Real Story," II. "This Moment," and III. "Entering the Garden." The central poem, "The Structures We Love," reflects in its own divisions those of the book. The first section of this poem asks the question

Must all projects founder
In the Dark?

In the second section, "The Journey into the Fire," we hear

Don't do it, says the sofa
Stay put, says your childhood,

Whatever it is, dullness
Is at least the absence of pain. . .

But worms are gouging out your heart,
They are about to eat it

Unless you take action
At once

You will stay here forever, smothering

In the overstuffed pillows of a past
That is banked ashes already, . . .

But to stay would be to forfeit everything.

“Everything” is the only life we have: action that is the condition of remembrance. After defying the Dark and agreeing to share in the transitory nature of the world a healing is made possible:

Sunning yourself on the surface, baptized

By pain out of hibernation, drenched
In the sopping wet feathers of luck,

Even in the midst of sorrow

You embrace everything, in the loose
and watery cathedral of the world

The loose and watery cathedral of the world is opposed to the cathedral of an earlier poem where it is the fiction that time can be stopped and perfectly known. In “Big Top,” the cathedral is a patriarchal institution which is decaying grotesquely. The butterflies on the walls provide a metaphor for our real possibilities:

Like tiny trapeze artists, brave athletes, unknowing,
They have pushed their small selves high up
Perhaps for warmth, perhaps for a quick look at the sun
But then, exhausted, they flatten themselves to the walls

And cling there, trembling, velvet children folded,
Pinned to the gray sides of the church
Like strange beautiful emblems, a lost corps de ballet

Just as in “Big Top” the cathedral is termed “he,” so also is the primal terror of chaos depicted as the male principle. In “The Bus at Midnight” the nightmare vision concludes:

But still questing everywhere, a boa constrictor

Even though it is clearly mistaken,
Stupid as a stuffed codpiece

It keeps right on coming,
Pushing and pulling at the house

More powerfully than Zeus's swan
Implacably it appears to me, transfixed. . .

All we can do is wait:
If this be a Messenger I pray

This bus like a wild boar,
This bus like the end of the world,

This bus like a blind phallus
Is knocking at the wrong door.

Yet there *is* more that we can do than wait. The dilemma is resolved by the lives of particular men who struggle as the poet does between the poles of negation. In the exquisite poem, "The Odor of Sanctity," we meet such a man:

But living out there by himself, keeping the sharp sting
Of his solitary labors hidden, constantly studying

Mostly he is alone, in the secret amber of the hive
Droning mysteriously, in tongues

Except that sometimes he will speak to us like a child
Simply, in his dark man's voice
Suddenly he will be crying out WHY?. . .

Far back in his eyes there will come a light,
The fragrance of candles, especially when he comes to call

With the slim envelope of his soul flapping
Over his head, the first clumsy biplane bumbling

In great friendly gusts, rich winey bucketfuls of hot tar
All the old cracked roads in the country heal themselves

Under the weather of his influence, like red apples in root cellars,
Cool rainwater on dry bricks
Among the dampening leaves at long last laying the dust.

The rewards that come with daring to participate are as fleeting and momentous as the visitation by egrets:

The giant castle walls of their wings
Lift themselves over our heads

Into such beautiful plumed gardens

We can't help it, on tiptoe
Something is happening to us, not feathers exactly,

But balanced on the palm of an updraft
The spirit straightens itself, soaring

Until we are able to see them
As we are meant to:

With the smoke of sunrise in our eyes

Fifteen white candles,
Fifteen white exclamation marks standing

Against the dawn sky.

(“The Arrival of the Egrets”)

In the last section of “The Structures We Love” entitled “The Journey into the Air,” the poet confronts that final mocking darkness with the words, “Whatever is dispersed gathers.” The gathering is our present task. If we are to share the fate of butterflies, decent men and the unannounced flight of egrets we must dare the furnace with our breath.

This is Ms. Goedicke’s vision. *The Wind of Our Going* displays mature technical ability and musical sophistication in service to that vision. She pulls us forward without release until she finds it herself and deftly plays every key in the modern rhyme-repertoire. With this book she comes to terms, in technique and insight, with the fact that

In the present that is always leaving us
Suddenly everything becomes clear

(“Across the Water”).

—Bette Thiebes