

# CutBank

---

Volume 1  
Issue 34 *CutBank* 34

Article 30

---

Fall 1990

## Lynda Sexson

Cindy Linse

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Linse, Cindy (1990) "Lynda Sexson," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 34 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss34/30>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

# Lynda Sexson, *Margaret of the Imperfections*

Persea Books, New York, 1988

*Reviewed by Cindy Linse*

At the various interstices of ordinary events and the imaginary dwell such things as escape the arbitrary and monotonous flow of daily life, such things as angels come to earth, foxes sporting floral gloves, and bodies sprouting pearls. And it is to these intersections that Lynda Sexson follows her characters in their search for meaning. Her collection of short stories, *Margaret of the Imperfections*, explores the same sort of intrusion of the bizarre or eruption of the once-hidden that delights readers of Eudora Welty through the same sort of uniquely personal vision of the world reminiscent of Flannery O'Connor's good country people. This is not to say her stories are derivative because, in the nexus of these two aspects of some of America's best fiction, Sexson finds her own voice, powerful in its poetic imagination and lyric sensibility.

In the opening story, Evelyn becomes convinced that her long-standing-bachelor brother has become engaged to the angel of their childhood secrets. She observes his fiancée eating lilac blossoms while birds fly through her. This could be interpreted as simply the hallucination of a sister jealous for an idealized fraternal love that she seems to be losing, but Sexson's sensitivity to her character allows Evelyn's vision a wholeness and verity of its own, drawing a perfect tension between the two realities.

The title story, in which Margaret begins to produce perfect pearls from her flesh, also veers into the so called 'magic realism.' But perhaps more important than the miracle of the pearls is the discovery it leads to, a discovery that emerges from the human psyche just as the pearls erupt from her flesh.

Discovery illuminates the interiors of all Sexson's characters, interiors so well explored in this collection. Not all the stories incorporate the magical, but each involves the uncovering of a past hidden in the evolution of the character's inner landscape, hidden in the construction of his or her unique reality. Some of these hidden pasts are as mundane and worldly as long-forgotten jewel thefts, illicit loves and murder. What lends them their sense of other-worldliness is the transformative power of the individual imagination; each story bravely enters the imaginary of its characters to give the reader a unique world, like a palimpsest, laid over the recognizable events of the quotidian. Where these two

intersect, the reader finds the very personal lexicon each character has developed for his or her life.

Perhaps, Lynda Sexson's lyrical language arises from these same crossroads. One passage from "Ice Cream Birth," in a letter from Korea, flows out of a uniquely poetic observation:

Every shop has a charming wrap, and every sale is completed as a kind of celebration, confusing commerce and presents...even a pair of socks from Eastgate—from a woman whose stall is the size of our closet in the old house, and whose entire inventory is socks. She forgives me, I feel, all that is grotesque in my life and hers; as she wraps the socks, she gives them to me so I am not guilty of purchase. And she returns, to herself and to me, all our dignity.

Another passage from "Foxglove" illustrates wonderfully the blend of imaginary and daily in a wholly poetic language:

I have three fingers suited up in fox-glove blossoms, when I notice the factor of time on the stalks. The bells ascend the shafts in a sequenced pattern of ripeness. The lowest corollas are already withered, the uppermost are yet green-globed futures. Past, present, future. The foxglove spires cluster their notations on time. Counting on their fingers. Digitalis. Hurrying the hearts contemplating death.

Passages of this sort are far from rare and often the simplest description turns out a surprisingly beautiful flow of words. Not all Sexson's character's are so witty in their observations, but each is alive with the will and imagination to turn question to answer. As Cathryn, from "Foxglove," observes, "to hear it wrong, in order to have the freedom to make it up, is the only escape from commonplace time."