

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Beatrix Gates: Two Poems

Beatrix Gates · Wednesday, July 1st, 2015

Beatrix Gates is the author of *Dos* ([Finishing Line Press](#)), and her poetry collections include *In the Open*, a Lambda finalist, and *Ten Minutes*. She has published in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Bloom* and *The Kenyon Review* with poems upcoming in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Anthem*. Gates, with Electa Arenal, translated Jesús Aguado's *The Poems of Vikram Babu* (HOST), and they shared a Witter Bynner Translation Award. As librettist for "The Singing Bridge," Gates received support with composer Anna Dembska from the NEA, LEF and Davis Foundation for the premiere at the Stonington Opera House. Gates founded Granite Press (1976-1989), and she lives in Brooksville, Maine, while still loving NYC.

Seattle Layover

The horse's name was Kansas, one milky eye,
thickened winter coat. No halter, we stood
together in the open ring,
not an arm's length apart.
She stood, I stood.

I let myself be a person
in my bones, two-legged, thickened flesh at my hips—
feet, still agile, hands ready.
I did not move.

So you just want to be here, I said aloud,
Me too.
We stood.
I let her enter my body by standing next to her
and she grazed along my tiredness, my small fear,
and I let them spool into the ankle-high brown dirt.

Penny had gone to get hay
out of the car and check on the dogs,
roaming the muddy paddocks, suspiciously
quiet. I stood with Kansas.

She lowers her head and brushes me, knee to navel
with her long nose, twice, gently.
I reach for her powder gray neck,
open my hand—stunning softness and thick
bow muscle underneath her coat.
So strong. So soft, I say to her.

She reaches her head to nudge my hips.
You want me to get on—ride again?
I can't. It's been too long. And I hear the strangeness
of a disappearing path. Is it really too late—
for how many things?

I turn to her—OK. You want to walk, let's walk.
I start, the way Penny did,
Kansas on my right, walking in front of her left shoulder.
She follows. We do some loopy diagonals
and wobbly figure eight's.

I walk, she follows
but she knows she is leading the way, satisfied.
Ring time evaporates into the night air.
We walk together. All is right.
How long has it been?
Time wobbles in the figure eight
altering the circle.
We're cutting corners
making x's.

Why was I afraid,
and how has this become the shape of things?
I could walk a long time,
keep walking with this horse,
without ever getting on her back.
I could remember strong bones
in a ring deep in brown dust.

We walk to the half-gate.
I call out to Penny. No answer.
The purple webbed halter hangs above
on a nail. Kansas waits for it.
She nods her head.
I take it down, study the shape,
think I can remember.
I turn the straps top,
the open bottom, hold it to her
and she slips her head in.
We're ready.

I call to Penny
 outside—three times,
 then she comes in with a sack,
 a collie at her heels.
 Bring her over.
 We walk by the other horses, some lit by a bulb,
 many dark in their stalls, and I wonder
 if they feel secure, safe in their stalls,
 and how they hear distance, closeness, the dark.

Penny snaps a lead to Kansas' halter
 and she pushes Penny with her broad skull
 directing the next brush stroke.
 Penny's hair falls in her face—
 All right, all right, we're just slow.

She wags her gray head at Kansas,
 and I lift mine higher to see the swirls
 of sweat caked on the mare's back.
 I'm a bit afraid, going against the grain
 to curry loose the dirt.

Above the Cloud Floor

for Zev

The view is like no other
 the wood shining amber below
 an opening cloud window
 pulling me through
 softly softly.
 I've never been so high the light
 as I slip through
 and roll onto the floor of the clouds
 going forever in all directions
 standing still.

I remember the almost 3-year-old
 saying that day how it's a long way up to heaven
 and there's people up and down all the time.

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