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Book Review: Prime Meridian by Connie Post

John Brantingham · Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020

Connie Post's newest poetry collection, *Prime Meridian* is more than just a book that  investigates the ongoing life of a family that has been damaged by an abusive father, but that is perhaps the largest theme that runs through it and certainly as a reader, that is the part that I am left contemplating after having read it. Such a book can be healing for the poet, and the best can be healing for the reader as well. This is one of those books. The narrator relives life since childhood dealing with someone who is sometimes violent, often drunk, and difficult to deal with always. She must find a way to break away from his hold, and when she does, she is left with memories of the man, which still haunts her and what feels like unresolved guilt for not being there for him as he ages, although she clearly has nothing to feel guilty about.

So many of these poems drew me into the family drama that feels similar to so many family dramas. The poem "De-boning a Fish" remains in my memory because of the power of the last lines. As a child, the narrator watches the fish that her father catches gasping and struggling on land before they are killed, and she wonders if they pray for the death he is bringing to end their suffering, and she ends the poem with this idea:

you can tell me
(and I already know)
that fish
don't understand
these kinds of things

but neither does
a small child

at some point
don't we all beg
for mercy (21)

By the time that we have caught up with the narrator in the present tense, she is no longer begging for mercy, but the memories of that time in her life remain raw, as they must. It is nice to be able to read the work of an author like this who reaches across the page and lets us know that we are not special or alone in our pain. Others have gone through it before us. She has. Now, she is showing us a way forward.

However, that way forward is not, of course, removed from pain. Once she has resolved to move

forward, she is left with unresolved memory. In “To Someone I Must Forget,” she writes,

I keep wondering what must be said
to make my skin forget
calloused hands against a throat

if I use all those words

bone
salt
knowledge
memory
marrow

will you understand
any better
where you reside (37).

She is left with the pain of the memory, and the pain of not being able to understand why she has been treated this way. There is no way to understand abuse, of course. It does not come from a rational place, but that does not mean that those who live with it don't crave explanation. Also, in the present tense, the narrator is left with the knowledge that her abuser is entering the pain of old age, and she wonders about him.

I don't want to know
that you live half way across town
broken in your Alzheimer's
broken from the decades
we have not spoken (38).

She has lost not only the potential for joy in her childhood, but also the care that she could be giving her parents now.

The best thing I can say about a book is that it is honest, and this one is. I love what Post has done here, and I admire it too. This is a book that should be read and understood and reread

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