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Book Review: Spaghetti and Meatballs: Poems for Hot Organs by Mendes Biondo

John Brantingham · Wednesday, February 13th, 2019

What struck me first about Mendes Biondo's *Spaghetti and Meatballs: Poems for Hot Organ* was how aggressive the sexuality of this new collection is. I wasn't offended or bothered in any way by it, but raw physicality runs through the book. This sexuality, however, is not what I was left with after having read the English translations of Biondo's Italian poetry. What I came back to was a new vision of the universal feeling of despair and loneliness we all feel, and the antidotes that he offers to that despair.

One of the more powerful poems is "The Earthquake." As the poem begins, the narrator's imaginary city is destroyed and people are left without homes. It is a tragedy, but the poem concludes:

> it [the earthquake] will come and unite us like the last time
> I really look forward to it
> even though I know it's not a good thing
> even though I know they are not things to say
> it will come and we will be so scared
> not to want to feel alone anymore (24).

What is to be feared in this collection is internal lack, existential crisis. Those things on the outside, surrounding us are almost inconsequential. People might lose their jobs, their homes, even their cities and that is a good thing if it allows them to feel a little less lonely.

In "Simpson's Syndrome, or: Trying to Run Away From Springfield," he uses *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy, South Park,* and *American Dad* to present the difficulties those of us who must work for a living face, and the desperate hope we have for something external to pull us out of poverty:

> it's a hard way to die
> awaiting I mean
> awaiting for something better
> or for a spin of the magical wheel (33).

This reflects the opening poem's ambivalence about the narrator's move from his home country to America where he sought his fortune:

> me with my hands still dirty
> of mud
> of shit
> of gold (3).

These are painful poems because they hit so close to home for so many of us. The promise of wealth in America is difficult to reconcile with our everyday lives, and Biondo presents that concept clearly and well.

Spaghetti and Meatballs: Poems for Hot Organs by Mendes Biondo is a strong collection of the despair that is often a part of the immigrant experience. He is able to clarify that pain and show us what it means.

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