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Review: *Ruin Porn* by Terry Wolverton

Vincent Trimboli · Wednesday, February 14th, 2018



Ruin Porn

Terry Wolverton

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*Today devours yesterday—
how long since I breathed this blighted air?
Map of recollection faded,
translucent as frozen petals
or dry, in hospitable skin.*

So wrote Terry Wolverton in the title poem of her new book *Ruin Porn* (Finishing Line Press, 2018), and indeed it has come to pass; The poet of “Ruin Porn” stands in the reflection of the poet’s life, both harrowing and shimmering in its beauty.

Residing somewhere between “the body and imagination,” the book paints a gritty and ethereal landscape of the human condition. Laser focused, Wolverton’s work reminds us of inhabiting our own body and then experiencing the commute to someplace new and “brighter.”

The poems in this collection find their strength not from the narrative, but from the musical voice, slipping in and out of streets and alleyways, a soft music, often in contrast to the more grating sound of the out-of-body world. Wolverton guides us through the landscape with sweet singing and undulating rhythm. The poems, themselves, are imaginative beyond the oft inarticulate and usual notions of the world. What proliferates on the page is a sister symphony to works such as ‘Rhapsody in Blue’—less steely, more breath, as seen in the poem “Passage”:

*Once the worn chord of “Pomp
and Circumstance” are struck,*

*will I find a phrase of morning or
just another cabinet of surrender?*

she continues:

*Perhaps I will always be floating,
no compass or clue, each moment
discarding everything I once
was sure I would be.*

Wolverton is in fact floating—between memory, both shimmering and solitude, and the current day rubble. The title ‘Ruin Porn’ was aptly chosen to show the hidden beauty of a world “aching and damp.” Wolverton’s work echoes those of the great “mystic” poets, but returns the lyric form to a far earthier realm of ozone and peat. And perhaps that is the great mystery conjured in these poems, the need to find our way back to our own ground. In “Green Honey,” the poet dreams:

*My eyes would wake to gardens
of milk blue clouds, ice crystals
dissolving like my heartbeats.
I’d come visit your atmosphere
to borrow a cup of rain.*

Wolverton’s poems can be baffling. The language and turns leave us with a disorienting need for our own introspective GPS. The map that she lays out is that of a city that is spooky and stylish, crumbling and colorful. Her aesthetic saturates every poem with a point of beginning and end, making the reader able to pick up from any point on the map and propel themselves forward into the landscape archived by the poet and her memory. This world is not just one place, but often a question ON place, be it “city” or “jail” or “fist.” In the poem “Imaginary City,” Wolverton revisits this very question, all the while beckoning for us to echo it back to her:

*What remains of the imaginary
city I am from? Have you forgotten
its crescent architecture, its industrial
rain? The Saturday night fandangos through
fitful traffic? Have you swept away all
the errant vows broken like teacups in
an empty basement, music of afternoon leaves?*

From the first of the poems collected in *Ruin Porn*, Wolverton has given us a crystal-clear lens to view our own landscapes. Finding the maximum shimmer in each detail fills this book with imagery and unexpected beauty that could easily be lost in the hands of a less deft poet. Elegiac and eccentric, this collection will leave you with a sense of residual magic and wonderment at the impermanence of experience and the thumbprint left on the landscapes that facilitate them. With the traits of a lyrical guidebook or urban grimoire, Wolverton has gifted us with a work that withstands.

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