

Luann Hiebert, *What Lies Behind*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2014. Pp. 93. Softcover, \$17.00.

A “mind field” lies behind, or beneath, Luann Hiebert’s debut collection of poetry. *What Lies Behind* is a collection of poems that celebrate the ordinary universe, the “cut & dried fields,” “the days/perfumed with birds,” with a stalwart mindfulness, a prayer-like reverence, and a keen awareness of the in/adequacy of language as well as the very act of speech. The speaker is caught in the “inbetweenness” that Patrick Friesen describes as follows: “It lives between the lines and lies. It straddles intellect and emotion.” (“Jugular Music,” *Interim: Essays & Mediations*, Regina: Hagios Press, 2006, 38). The poems halt and hesitate, there is a tentativeness to the unmoored lines, as they come to grips with the un/certainty they name and unname. The title of the collection announces the project: Hiebert tries to get to the bottom of things, certainly to get at what lies behind them, and to parse the language that defines and describes them. The opening poem serves as a metaphor for what we are to encounter throughout the collection, as the speaker in “look who’s looking” observes herself in the mirror and sees her mother and her self:

of my mother  
 mother of me  
 /me a mother

reflect on  
 mom/me

how un becoming

I am not (I am  
 Becoming [sic])

The mirror does not offer a perfect reflection, our first indicator



literary theory being imposed on poetry but, also, the theories of various social and political causes.” (38) Sometimes the clichés get the upper hand, as in “black & white:” “...stealing from room/to room she slides/silent as a hot blade/through butter/moon melts/on the floor.” Sometimes the internal rhymes dictate the logic of the poem, as in “undone”:

back to the beginning  
naked & lost  
& found

bound by the sound  
fibres of every word  
doubly knit.

As sound and rhyme fall into one another there is perhaps a desire, a search for likeness and similarity, intimacy and familiarity – that is not unlike love – in the figurative search for truth, other, identity, and god-ness or the divine.

Hiebert’s interest in prairie women’s poetry is apparent and I would argue that this collection contributes to that body of work. The prairie repertoire is recycled through the iris and shutter of Hiebert’s vision, her “startled eyes,” to good effect. We get the usual arsenal of prairie images and icons: the landscape, trains, crows, weather, the ubiquitous sun and wind and snow, set within the framework of a mindful narrator, aware of herself and the ties that bind and forge. The visual acuity of poems like “hoar frost” with its “breath-burrs” and “it’s not the cheer,” where pumpkins are “prairie pearls,” just to mention a few, are a delight. The auditory quality, perhaps hardest to encapsulate in writing, is beautifully rendered in “breathe,” where you can not only see, but practically hear and feel the breaths, as well as in the train poem “light rails,” where you can virtually hear and feel the train a comin.’

Hiebert’s collection contains 92 poems, most of which are a page long. There are no chapter or subheadings in this collection, no superimposing framework, which indicates perhaps a reluctance to categorize these poems, which feel like crafted moments in a lived life that is generous and devotional. Reading through this collection reminded me of days running together and blurring in the very best of ways, although there are short thematic runs of three to four poems that focus on a particular image or topic. The collection flows well, aging with the narrator, as it cycles through life into the more difficult terrains of relationships – the empty nest, menopause, illness and death – and the poems on these topics constitute some of the best in the collection.

morning is not  
a guarantee  
but for you & me  
we'll have our toast  
& cereal prayers  
("whispers of grace")

It doesn't get more plain or more potent than that. We too are looking and what we see is the woman in the mirror in her perpetual state of "un becoming." And behind her, we see ourselves. I look forward to seeing what lies ahead for Luann Hiebert.

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