

Maurice Mierau, *Autobiographical Fictions*. Kingsville, Ontario: Palimpsest Press, 2016. Softcover, \$18.95.

The contrary directions in the title of Maurice Mierau's new poetry collection, *Autobiographical Fictions*, flag the quirky, bewildering yet insightful, tender yet tough, appreciative but still angry

blend of disjunctive yet additive gestures that have become this poet's stylistic signature. This is Mierau's third poetry collection, following his award-winning memoir, *Detachment: An Adoption Memoir*. It's his best. It's beautiful. I can't put it down.

The world is dangerous, is crazy, is all jumbled up in its multi-culti po/mo fragments, these poems proclaim. Any one of us might jump the railing. The whole thing might blow up at any time. But let's love each other anyway, darling. It may not last, but we can remember each other later, in tender fragments, shards of broken glass. There's something humble, humbling, in the acceptance of the mad jumble of twenty-first century life that Mierau demonstrates, even as we seem to have lost our way, recognizing we are no longer on the wide paved road of infinite progress yet not sure which other way to turn. These poems add up to a quizzical, frustrated, yet profoundly hopeful voice and vision, funny and sad, and witty as all get out.

Mierau credits John Berryman in the opening poem, but he might also have cited the Canadian poet John Thompson; *Autobiographical Fictions* shows the same no-holds-barred leap into the heart of things that Thompson taught us, the same holding out for beauty, divinity, in the midst of desperation, despair, muddle, mud. I especially loved the poetic homage to Carl Ridd, whom many of us remember as an inspiring teacher and mentor at the University of Winnipeg. Here's how the poem "Religious Studies" ends – and you can catch the quirky flavor of the poems in these lightning quick progressions:

My teacher could have gone to Milwaukee
and played basketball with other tall men.
But he heard God or Beethoven, whose damaged
hearing still heard angels in Vienna.

He died quickly of cancer.
Someone heard the angels cry.
I heard only myself.

It's easier to describe the effect of the poems than to sum them up, given their wild multiple directions. Céline Dion, Nathanael West, Arnold Schoenberg, Friedrich Engels, Ovid, Neil Stonechild, Nietzsche, Stony Mountain inmates, Ridd, TMZ, CNN, Marilyn Monroe, Bob Marley, all join arms here in a fierce, funky, global round dance at the edge of the swirling center of the world. Mierau's satirical tone sometimes risks banality or cynicism, but in this collec-

tion it is pitch perfect. Everything appears haloed in its writhing, glowing, inspired, smiling angst.

Here's a glimpse of his fist shake at outmoded, tired, misused cosmologies, in a poem entitled "God Speaks in Two Choruses and An Act of Violence":

My name is God
and my money is offshore.

My name is God
and my servants fucked your children.

My name is God
and I privatized the rain.

Most importantly, the poems never lose hope, never let go of care, of *caring*: they are written from the heart, they reach for truth, but more, they reach for appreciation, gratitude, larger understanding. There is a giving up of power, a giving over, in them, which we might hold up as an expression of contemporary (Mennonite?) masculinity at its best, ready to give up a long sad heritage of patriarchal excesses and hollowness, ready to begin over, as the final collection's final line makes clear: "The snow was wrong and most of what I know." A momentous ending, and an opening into the new, with the possibility of grace.

You need to buy the book and read it from cover to cover to get the full flavour of it. Worthy every penny, guaranteed!

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