

Between The Covers

By Gerald Gargiulo

Amidst all the advertising soundbite noise we have become accustomed to on TV, amidst all the impulsivity and time consumption that personal computers entail, amidst the hurriedness by which we pass our days, amidst all this, is there still a place for poetry in our lives? Poetry which is not the domain of a few but a healing for the many? Is there a poetry that can have as wide an appeal as do our TV talk show hosts? The bards, I suspect, might work for less and give us more.

If you are curious as to what that giving could be, consider Elaine Preston's first book of poems, *Look for a Field to Land*, published by Bridge Works in Bridgehampton. Her style is sophisticated and her interests broad. Ms. Preston manages to capture the events of everyday life, with its loves and hates, its beauty, its absurdities and pain in a way which not only brings music to the ear but comfort to the mind. Most of these poems, I believe, help us be alone with ourselves. Her voice is strong and confident as she take us with her, for example, from childhood beginnings in South Carolina to her stay in a car caught, as we all have been in a traffic jam on the L.I.E. Never losing sight of the real, she captures the hidden just beneath the obvious. She does this, I believe, by describing the often unnoticed background to our everyday actions. Note as she writes:

But one weepysunshiny May I grew up
& was fixing to leave the South
My year-old daughter was set up
on a mattress in the VW back seat.
& coming-to-be-ex-husband getting
ready to head up to New York way in the front
with his bourbondrinking Carolina Buddy

and then bringing her descriptive powers to full play she adds:

My momma, who was Southerngood quick
as birdwing flashes by, my momma,
she said, why you takin that pitful chile
away to where there's no birdsong & sun?

Her poems recount love and loneliness, men and sex, mother and daughter, and the ever-present generational theme: looking for our lost parents as much as our loved parents. As one leafs through this slender volume we come to know about one woman's struggles to find her ground, to be alone with her anger as much as her sense of what is truly beautiful in life. We learn, in short, that what makes the passage of time bearable, as well as enjoyable, is neither other people's products nor other people's pain but rather our own need

to dialogue with our world. Good poetry helps us have that dialogue and in a democracy everyone should be taught to celebrate their own tongue.

Although I found her particularly sensitive and evocative when writing of her own childhood and family, her range of interests go beyond this. In a poem titled "The Weave" she describes her grief, as well as her bewilderment, at the disparity between Indian slave boys weaving rugs in order to support their parents, and the utter opulence of American life. She casts stones at no one. Slavery clearly comes in many forms.

... or they will be beaten with leather whips
... we're all
a very tight
weave . . .

We who are so used to seeing suffering on TV need all the help we can so that we do not lose our capacity to feel and know it from the inside. Good poetry does not stand in its own way; its words carry us along helping us touch other people's lives and our own as well. Many of Preston's poems are carriers.

... but sometimes
birdsong lifts easy
off the pause of leaves
rolls old images
against my heart
& the girl I once was
floats out the window
tucks herself onto wings
drifts down
into an old pine forest
where she ran & sang
before tract house
stole the trees.

Elaine Preston, who is a professor of English at Suffolk Community College, has read at Canio's in Sag Harbor. If she reads there again, go hear her. Short of that get her book and read it when you want some quiet time to remember the stolen trees of your own childhood and life. Her language is sensitive, her form sophisticated, and her thoughts evocative.

Amidst the plethora of poets and poems, Bridge Works Publishing is to be complimented for this fine selection and this volume.

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Look for a Field to Land

p o e m s

Elaine Preston