

Book Review: Back from Beyond

by Katherine Rubin. Pen Press Publication, 2008, 132 pp.

Back from beyond is a collection of the poems written during various periods in the life of a woman who started writing poetry in her youth during a post-partum episode of mania, and then, after a pause of decades while coping with bipolar disorder, rediscovered her inspiration to write. The poems are short and accessible, the English flowing and enjoyable, and many relate to issues of mental health and loss.

The book is a monument to rehabilitation in its most recent sense, discovering a sense of fulfillment in one's life, apart from considerations of whether one is "symptom-free," and irrespective of the reductionist aspects of "being bipolar." In "Elusion," she writes:

In this forsaken place you seek me out,
Inspiration, my long lost friend.
Somehow you have eluded
Their pills and sombre diagnoses
And brought me boundless joy. (p. 36)

In the second phase of writing she is older, and struggling with ill health and a sense of lost youth, in which satisfaction must be found by getting up and going for a swim:

At the pool for some gentle exercise
I find relief from rheumatic pain.
To be young and slim again I fantasise
Whilst splashing in the slow lane. (p. 53)

The second phase is more pessimistic, looking back, and could be called "life on a slow burner" (p. 58), or "splashing in the slow lane." A later section deals with everyday matters. For example, of the task I am undertaking, she writes:

Much of life has passed me by:
The world of books unexplored
While films merely flickered.
Perhaps I'm not qualified
To critique a colleague's work. (p. 94)

The confusion of being an Israeli is well expressed in "Friday Evening":

You watch as each side
buries its dead
and swears vengeance (p.100)

The main feature of the volume, besides its stunning front-cover illustration, is the author's lack of self-pity. It is truly a celebration of a person who has had to deal with mental illness, but has emerged with an awareness of all the details of life and her ability to record them.

The book is available from the author at: sevenwv@netvision.net.il

Her poems have also been published in *The Awakenings Review*, a beautifully produced journal of literary works by people coping with mental disorders, edited since 2000 by Robert Lundin. See: www.awakeningsproject.org

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