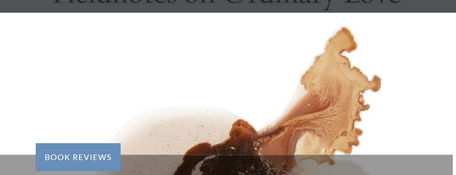

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: Fieldnotes On Ordinary Love by Keith S. Wilson

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> ***Thanks to Copper Canyon Press for advance review copy. Review by Jagari Mukherjee***

In Shakespeare's problem play, *Troilus and Cressida*, the eponymous heroine remarks, "For to be wise, and love/ Exceeds man's might; that dwells with gods above." Keith Wilson's Fieldnotes On Ordinary Love explores the interplay of affection is all its myriad aspects. The intriguing title places the narrator in the position of an active bystander, a person researching a topic of interest through observation, not interfering in the process, and recording his findings in a notebook. However, in this volume, the poems employ the first-person narrative technique, and so, the poet/narrator observes himself and his close relationships.

One may also wonder if love can ever be described as ordinary, since experiencing love is most extraordinary. There are entire works of literature dedicated to the theme of love and its cohorts: loss, infidelity, jealousy, and possessiveness, which intrinsically imply an element of drama. Thus, by ordinary love, perhaps dramatic elements are absent. As we read through the poems, we understand that there is enough juice in the mundane and the diurnal. We are reminded of Russian Formalist Viktor Shlovsky's essay 'Art as Technique' where he defines defamiliarization or estrangement as a technique that aims at making the reader perceive quotidian words and objects from a new, strange, unfamiliar perspective. Shlovsky argues that poetry has the power to alter our perception of words: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged".

The Imagery of light and dark pervades the poem, "Light As Imagined Through A Body of Ice", where defamiliarization occurs almost as literally as light fragmented through a prism. The structure consists of ten lines of unrhymed couplets, where paintings are described as being analogous to human bodies. The 'we' in the poem refers to the couple whose love might expand them into the light, thereby making their love the focus of this piece. There is an inherent rhythm in the daily life Keith S. Wilson, expressed through his lens concentrated on his partner.

> *You go to museums to fall in love/ with the most impassioned strokes, to share the genuflections/ of love. And then you go home to what works every day/, catch your glint of everything off the edge of the fork.*

The beautiful opening poem "Aubade to Collapsed Star" has all the elements of a 'morning after" poems – two lovers awakening after spending a night together, reminiscent of Metaphysical classics like John Donne's *The Good Morrow* and *The Sun Rising*. The first line has an abrupt beginning but turns the tradition on its head as it addresses the beloved rather than the sun, although the latter is duly mentioned.

> *You bankrupt the sun, underwater/ statue. Dark galaxy of faults, our bed /a garden of the littlest sighs/ of our waking.*

The bed of the lovers is a space that encapsulates the galaxy; the narrator remarks on the little details associated with the beloved—her limbs, her breath, the dark pollen of her hair. He confesses that he loves her (he had said so the day before) and that he should have married her against the doubts posed by the world. The end of the poem employs contrasting imagery, jarring notes of the unsavory juxtaposed with the ethereal.

> *I am dreaming imaginary/ numbers of fruit flies, mercury and birdsong,/ and the trash collector, and the water glittering/ beige in the street. Of the Milky Way as portrayed by the swirl /of your waves.*

The end of the poem comes as a shock to the reader, who realizes that the narrator is separated from the beloved. He misses waking up with her every morning when he looks at the walls and remembers her laughter and her mascara. Thus, the "collapsed star" of the title refers to the relationship that the narrator has lost, presumably because he backed out of marrying his beloved, whom he still loves. The aubade is an act of repetition as far as his memory of her is concerned.

Keith S. Wilson's compositions are replete with variety even within the parameters of 'ordinary love.' "The Way I Hold My Hands" is the delineation of the relationship between the narrator and his father, "Fieldnotes", in thirteen short stanzas, explores what it means to be black, modeled on Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", and "I Find Myself Defending Pigeons" is a prose poem that moves from the personal to the universal. Fieldnotes On Ordinary Love is a record of a sensitive poet's extraordinary point of view.

Keith S. Wilson is an Affrilachian Poet, Cave Canem fellow, and graduate of the Callaloo Creative WritingWorkshop. He has received three scholarships from Bread Loaf as well as scholarships from MacDowell, the Millay Colony, Poetry by the Sea, Ucross, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He currently serves as Assistant Poetry Editor at *Four Way Review* and Digital Media Editor at *Obsidian Journal*. (Source: Adroit Journal)

Jagari Mukherjee is the resident editor of **PoetryandPoets.com.** A gold medalist in MA in English Language & Literature from the University of Pune, her poems and other creative pieces have been published in different venues both in India and abroad. She is a Best of the Net 2018 nominee, a DAAD scholar from Technical University, Dresden, Germany, a Bear River alumna, and the winner of the Poeisis Award for Excellence in Poetry 2019, among others. In June 2019, Cherry-House Press, Illinois, USA, published her debut chapbook Between Pages. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. from Seacom Skills University, Bolpur, India.

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