

Review of Sheila Dietz's *The Berry and the Bee*



Reading Sheila Dietz's *The Berry and the Bee* is like biting into a delicious pie of luscious words, imagery, and pregnant subtext. The chapbook explores enduring themes of joy, loss, health, and more, through an expert handle on the use of line, word choice, and imagery.

Her poetry is rarely sentimental or wildly emotional, but rather steady, wise, and quietly observational. Even when writing about a near sexual assault by a stranger while hitchhiking as young girls in "Desert Stargaze (1970)," Dietz takes the approach by narrating the scene rather than delving into the emotional and psychological impact of the experience – a distance that broadens a space for the reader to have their own experience while reading the poem. And yet, when one begins to really sit with the poems, one begins to realize that the calm cadence and measured unfurling of details actually belie a turbulent, violent, and tragic world. In "Ecosystem Disruption – as a haibun," Dietz writes about how a new building irrevocably changes the natural landscape she has grown quite familiar with, describing the "Styrofoam cup, some soggy matchsticks," and how the water "bleeds" out into the sea.

Dietz's poems call us to ponder the magic in the everyday, such as in her poem "Hidden Shoes," which beautifully paints an image familiar to many of us – "A shaft of sunlight angled low crawls/across a wooden ledge that holds/a house sparrow nest" where a pair of shoes are found during a home repair project. Dietz muses on the origins of these shoes in a playful unraveling of thoughts, ending with – "who knows whether these shoes dance at night./I think they might." Such

musings are much needed in a time when information enters our attention at a lightning speed, barely allowing us to register what is right in front of us.

The Berry and The Bee is a jaunt through the mind of a writer for whom place and objects vibrate with meaning, and this reader thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with the world through this lens.

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