

only to scholars and students of Italian America, but to everyone interested in learning the art and craft of good book reviewing: read 'em and learn!

*The Arrows That Choose Us* by Marilyn Annucci. Winston-Salem: Press 53, 2018. 79pp.

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Both surrealistically metaphysical and religious, the poems collected by Marilyn Annucci in this first book, winner of the 2018 Press 53 Award for Poetry, and insightfully introduced by Tom Lombardo, surprise us with wonder. They brim with epiphanies and detailed palpability in terms of commitment to past memories and present actuality. Cleverly crafted, and imbued with lyrical metaphor (“forgive me my moments of doubts— / my mortal fabric [the dress her mother is sewing for her and pinning on her body] / would lie there, yes, // bearing the marks”), witty similes (“and something that looks like a ribbon of eel / that leaves by the bedroom window”), and keen images after Dickinson (“When the rain comes / like gossamer / ... / and fills the rooms / like the tide inside a snail”), this debuting book testifies to a long apprenticeship: rhythmic modalities, lexicon, figures of speech, sound, imagism. It promises a greater bounty to come.

While investigating her relationship with the outer world—places she has known, people she has met, her lover, her mother (“a surgeon over a disembodied angel”), particles of Nature, the anatomical human body, and even artifacts—Annucci explores her inner world with exigent scrutiny by questioning overwhelming discordances, and by heuristically seeking responses from a silent, overlooking entity. Through the arrows that pierce us (one might think of a St. Sebastian’s iconic perspective) she undertakes a quest for understanding where and why suffering hurts us. She also probes appalling religious, cultural, and even scientific mysteries (cf. “The Smallest Bones” and the eponymous poem), to which apparently no answer is to be provided. Sometimes, however, she leaves a window open to an eventual repairing light from outside or above, as in “Atrium”:

The smallness in humans  
cannot be measured, is too  
big. After hurt or betrayal,

some wither. Others  
close tight as the fist of a bud

and will not open again..

If they do, they do so  
not in a wild forest  
not even an ordinary grassy yard

but in a safe, domed place  
with others who lean toward the sun  
which is far away through glass.

#### Atrio

La piccolezza negli umani  
non può essere misurata, è troppo  
grande. Dopo una ferita o un tradimento,

alcuni si atrofizzano, altri si  
chiudono a pugno come di bocciolo  
e non si apriranno di nuovo.

Se lo fanno, lo fanno  
non in una selva

e neanche in un comune giardino

ma in un posto protetto a cupola  
con altri che si tendono al sole  
lontano, oltre il vetro.

Or she shows gratitude towards what is in any case given, accepted with humility, a searching eye and a delightful rupture for having been “lucky enough” to have at least once, for an instant of time, possessed it (“Lucky Enough”), so that thanks to “mercy” even “the greatest cement stands to glow” (“North”).

This book opens itself up to swinging cheerfulness, too, as when Annucci plays whimsically with fortune cookies that she compares to clams for keeping their “own counsel.” When “the shell lies empty / as a shallow bowl,” it means that “The circle is running in the right direction,” so please do not throw it away, but rather “lift it to your ear / and hear the sea rush that washed it // to your shore.” But if the cookie lies cracked, “raise it to your tongue // and taste the plain vessel that carried / such glad news: *Your life will soon be // graced with happiness.*”