

Linda Hogan. *Eclipse*. Native American Series, No. 6. (Los Angeles: University of California, 1983) 63 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Linda Hogan's poetry is of the "world," a word which recurs frequently in *Eclipse*, her latest book of poems. The poems are personal yet not confessional. She speaks of the earth—and for the earth—in the roles of human being, Native American, woman, mother, daughter, and granddaughter. They are not the poems of self absorption, of reduction. Here the superficial idiosyncrasies of individuality are eclipsed by the Great Mystery, by the "light" of creation, of consciousness:

The last time I looked
you were standing in light,
pollen scattering the air.
Even the sky was beginning to burn,
a fireline
above the mountain's blue smoke.

A mixed-blood Chickasaw raised in what was Indian Territory in the contemporary state of Oklahoma, Linda Hogan is well aware of the fickle and too often cold-blooded turns of history:

I think of shining a light through my hands
and how the bones hold to flesh,
of being alive one moment
moving the air,
and the next changed to earth,
a red shadow
whose death went unnoticed.

The book is rife with ruins and bones. The natural order articulated here is free of romance, of innocent animism. We can annihilate ourselves, this poet knows. In one of its six sections especially, and in several other poems, the book confronts with unnerving particularity the real danger of nuclear extermination:

I remember how the Japanese women
turned to go home and were lost
in the disappearances
that touched their innocent lives
as easily as they touched small teacups
rattling away
on shelves.

For survival, then, as fragile and "innocent" as humankind is, we must seek to balance ourselves with each other and with all of creation, this poet believes: poems of the earth and for the earth. We are only one part in the network of creation, a network of bridges:

White scaffolds of bone
bridge the dark water of nothing...

Life is a delicate conjunction of many lives, a confluence of the primal elements—earth, water, air, fire—“symmetry of light and dark.” The poems do not trade cheaply on their Indianness. Sentiment is convincingly and subtly evoked in a tension of opposites: earth/sky, male/female, life/death, traditional/nontraditional, past/present, natural/synthetic, sacred/profane. In life’s dynamism this poet finds promise and obligation. We renew ourselves always in

the ruins of another life
formed by earth
like a scar that makes us beautiful.

The poems are reverent. The poems are anxious. The poems are frightened. The poems are passionate, yet rarely are they strident, never self-righteous. Persuaded into the landscape of lives, one *feels* an urgency for order. This poet says we are “home,” that we share a home, if only we would choose to recognize it. Bridges, not roads, connect us. Together we can dream “all the dark roads/out of the world.”

Linda Hogan’s poems illuminate a natural network and share profound wonder over its mysteries and worry over its vulnerability. They remain insistently concrete. They surprise in the freshness of their language and imagery. Only rarely do the poems relax into the familiar or take an easy way around the complexity of experience. This is a strong book, an authentic voice, a voice so clear and right, for the most part, that it invisibly brings the “world” of the poems to life:

Sweet pollution,
the trees in morning,
black locust,
red willow,
trees and wind moves
move this life,
my voice in the leaves.

— Steve Pett
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