



Every Vanish Leaves Its Trace by Elizabeth Aoki

Reviewed by Eric Weinstein

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Elizabeth Aoki's *Every Vanish Leaves its Trace* is a spare book, comprising only eighteen poems. The poems themselves are somewhat spare as well, even naked, and intimate: in the first, "Speaking Language," Aoki instructs us to "Listen harder. Tell me / what I look like, once you've looked away."

Although well-wrought and emotionally charged, Aoki's poetry rarely moves beyond the page to inhabit the reader's world after he or she has closed her slim volume. Several of the poems, "Padlock," and "Ecdysis" among them, close the reader off from the poet before the full measure of her emotional impact can be felt; "Padlock" bogs itself down in linguistic vagueness, and "Ecdysis" never elaborates on what it is that "you could not keep / inside, ripping through into something never before seen."

At times Aoki seems to overcompensate for these shortcomings, producing poems that are transparent metaphors for everyday, intimate activity. "Canopic Jar" is an example, relying on trite, advertisement-inspired language to convey a predictable idea (sex) through the extended metaphor of death and burial: "But Sheila knew that whenever she took the handle / of a shovel in her teeth, it drove men crazy."

Nonetheless, as Derek Sheffield points out in his blurb for the book, Aoki has an excellent ear ("I think of our world wound round with strings," from "String Theory") and it is for this reason that I enjoyed *Every Vanish Leaves Its Trace*. Aoki is earnest and more than capable, and I look forward to her future work. I leave off, then, with my favorite lines from the collection, an excerpt from the final poem, "Transplant," in which she considers the (after)lives of organ donors:

...Whose greater rhythms of flesh wore down
Or ended gently enough that gifts could be given
Like the ocean, churning over and over
Ribbons invisible until death.

And how they interact with those they save from death:

Old blood to new blood, all the organs
Gathered like orphans
Around the fire of the heart.

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Prick of the Spindle Poetry Editor Eric Weinstein recently graduated magna cum laude from Duke University with an AB in English and Philosophy. His writing has previously appeared in a variety of online and print publications, including *The Archive*, *Wheelhouse Magazine*, *Prick of the Spindle*, and *Rainy Day*. His poetry has been nominated for inclusion in *Pusheart Prize XXXIII: Best of the Small Presses (2009)*. A native of New Hampshire, he currently lives in Hoboken, New Jersey.

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