

our initial frames of understanding are unable to accommodate. In offering a paradoxical, even Sisyphean quest to understand body on mind's terms, Machlin seems to suggest that the true nature of body, however plainly and physically present, is always concealed in the preconceptions and prejudices that we use to determine its presence.

The two later sections of *Dear Body* evince what I will risk calling both “great promise” and “exciting potential”: neither compares with the first section of the book, which shocked me out of my typical mechanisms for reading—and maybe even for living. Machlin's is not light-hearted humor: it's the uneasy upwelling of a laughter that comes from recognizing what it feels like to be caught in the tangled pull-wires of desire, habit, belief—a trap inevitably of one's own making.

Rusty Morrison

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Eileen Myles, *Sorry, Tree*. Seattle: Wave Books, 2007. 83pp. \$14

For many people, Eileen Myles's biography precedes her poetry: St. Mark's Poetry Project director; descendant of the New York School and assistant to James Schuyler; “openly female” write-in candidate for the 1992 US presidential election (with dog-clad campaign buttons); art critic for *Village Voice* and *Art in America*; performer with Sister Spit; and most recently, professor at the University of California, San Diego. Myles's persona spins grandly at the center of her work. The promotional leaflet tucked into the review copy of *Sorry, Tree* celebrates Myles's “trademark punk-lesbian sensibility and intimate knowledge of poetic tradition,” and the adjacent blurbs dub her a “cult figure to a generation of young, post-punk female-writer-performers.” She is the “rock star of modern poetry.” These frames, however, do not capture what is most vital in Myles's poetry. Her politics are overt, her physicality raw, yet it is the subtle, gentle *noticing* in her poems that overwhelms.

*Sorry, Tree* comprises three long narrative poems, a sestina, and twenty-six lyrics that embrace the ordinary. The poems rise up out of conversation and happenstance, as in the opening of “Cigarette Girl”:

a long rain  
drop more  
of a tear  
fell from  
an awning or a nail  
shit the top  
of a roof  
and hit my neck

inside my  
coat  
I don't know  
how it got  
in so perfectly  
& struck  
my flesh  
my warm  
white neck  
on a rainy  
night in  
winter  
I almost  
said this to you

Huddled outside during a smoke break, the speaker, who is “a lonely American” in a foreign city, is shocked into noticing her own skin by a single, precise raindrop. The poem’s imagery and experience is disarmingly direct, capturing movement in clusters of assonance that reverberate with the speaker’s realizations. The long vowels of the first five lines embody the slow descent of the drop; in the sixth line, they shift to the jarring “shit” to foreground the aural and sensual immediacy of the actual “hit” on her neck inside her coat. At the end of the stanza, the speaker almost tells the cigarette girl about the raindrop, but since she doesn’t have the right language to “break into” (as she reveals in the following stanza), she instead feels her own “limits / contract & / expand.” Bridled by the words, the speaker stills, but only for a moment.

In the third and final stanza, she quickly reacts against these limits and attempts to rid herself of her desire for the right words:

I grab the white  
handle of  
my speech  
like it's an  
umbrella  
and I shake  
it free  
of words  
empty American  
balloon  
holy smoke

She shakes her speech, her umbrella, free of the drops of words in order to assert the primacy of experience. Had she actually been holding an umbrella, had she been armed with the right language to explain her experience, she

would have been protected against this moment of realization. But Myles instead elevates direct experience by freeing herself from the filter of explanation, the “empty American / balloon.”

It is Myles’s adherence to truth, to getting things right without overdetermining them, that stands out in *Sorry, Tree*. Poems enraptured by beauty acknowledge difficulty, ugliness, or doubt, as in “Jacaranda,” here in its entirety:

What’s  
the feminine  
of feet  
I didn’t  
know I  
could  
have  
a lavender  
tree

Rather than dwelling in the beauty of the purplish foot-shaped flowers of the jacaranda tree, Myles explores the tension between ownership and femininity. The slant rhyme between “have” and “lavender” underscores the arbitrariness of our gender associations. With clear, unadorned speech, Myles asserts the tree’s presence beyond her gaze, while preserving the speaker’s moment of attention.

Myles’s short, fast-paced enjambed lines make visible the observations of a speaker who takes the world in through quick breaths. Rapid, shining glimpses gleam in their original takes and feel alive in the arranged homes of her poems. The result is a fulfilling juxtaposition between the raw and the meticulous, the spontaneous and the controlled, as in her four “Dear Andrea” poems: “I see a little / duck’s head. / Just separate—under the sand. / Are you really going / to read that.” “You’re / like an orangutan. / You’re like a little brother / I just allowed in the bed.” “Are you paying / attention // \$50 for his ticket / \$50 for his cat-case // These’ll / Diesel.”

As a poet of inclusion, Myles lets much into her poems that interrupts clear lyrical expression—others’ voices, distant movements, and her own editorializing banter. “I just saw a coyote / tippy tippy tippy.” The deposits of dailiness accumulate, and readers become intimate with beautiful, grotesque, and seemingly inconsequential detritus.

When the speaker places herself on the line or baldly declares her yearning, we end up believing her, rooting for her. “I’m not sure who I walk with in America today. // I miss you, my imagined accomplice.” “I want to be a part of something bigger than myself.” “I fight / for / you.” Myles seems to have arrived at the declarations in *Sorry, Tree* after a great deal of her own

resistance, and as a result she earns our trust. Rarely does a poem arrive at an emotional conclusion without disruption or stoppage, without directly facing the possibility of being wrong.

Occasionally a book convinces me that what is relevant exceeds my noticing: “A coin / on its / side / speaking up” or an “incessant / trembling bridge / which a tree / is” or “power / boxes...painted / like art.” This is such a book, and it reminds me of what’s possible should I engage my environment with greater alertness and with the openness (which is confidence) to let the world come through as it is.

Leila Wilson

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Jennifer Moxley, *The Line*. Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2007. 56pp. \$15

*The Line* is a marvelous title, and marvelous achievement, not least because it names a volume of prose poems where the title describes the thread of an argument rather than a distinctive formal unit. Moxley is the contemporary American poet who is perhaps least attached to the intricacies of the line in lyric poetry, at least in the sense that she rarely makes supple song-like use of the metrical resources the line offers. One sees in this volume that her awkwardness with the line unit may stem from her fascination with other means of providing the internal density we expect of major lyric poetry. Intricate syntactic variety is her source of rhythm, a source that makes the mind’s powers directly visible and establishes something like a right for the poem to make demands on its readers.

Moxley calls upon several meanings of the line—the most important being “the old words new mind lost time and loves” that extend “backward eternally into the past and forward into the future.” The line evokes Eliot’s tradition without the hierarchy and with a more dynamic sense of what it means to participate in that tradition’s rhizomatic ways. The line is also a life-line, a line in poetry, the line of a thought or argument, the line that divides speculation from the world, and the line that attempts seduction and risks being seduced by its own success.

Staging these various manifestations of the line requires Moxley to break with traditional lyricism, where the actual presence of discrete lines insists on the metrical component and pushes other possible meanings to the background. She musters a substantial positive force from this negative move by retaining a decidedly lyrical intelligence that she sets on different, less narcissistic paths. Probably the most important of these paths consists in how Moxley develops a version of “you” as the fundamental mode of lyric