

*Let the Voices* by Kevin Goodan, Red Hen Press, 2016 61p, paper \$9.95 • *Let the Voices* is Kevin Goodan's fourth full-length collection of poetry, and its lyrical fortitude is raw and gallant. Many of the poems are set in a trailer park on the Flathead Indian Reservation, where the violence of poverty covers everything like the pesticide residue from crop-dusting. A blue water tower and contrails hover above the trailer park like the billboard eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, but the American Dream has never been part of this dusty landscape. Here, children die brutally by drowning, in house fires, by hanging in a woodshed, and alcohol abuse.

These lyric meditations are rooted in "an absence of presence, / an opening out," a vast Western landscape whose main feature is sky. Planes and birds take flight, leaving the ground, remembering "those who took to the earth." Really, these poems are a collection of elegies of the saddest kind, elegies for children. Two poems, "When the Maughan house caught fire" and "When Bobby Irvine drank himself to death in the eighth grade," are set at funerals, and the perspective is that of children: "all the children who walked past / reached in, touched him. / Every night that week children dreamt / of a white hand reaching up to them." Narrative moments of lives and deaths are woven into these lyrics, so that what results are tightly braided lyric narratives.

Goodan's use of language and punctuation provides a space for contemplation and memory. The poems do not have titles as such, but rather a first line that's left justified above the poem and leads directly into the poem. Dickinson whispers from the first title-lines of poems such as "To gauge one's life" or "In this late hour." A slant grace occupies these poems, allowing them to cross a landscape of loss.

In a traditional elegy, there are three stages: lament, praise, and lastly solace. Throughout the collection, Goodan offers solace through an open pastoral, blanketed with rain or snow; however, the end of the collection offers consolation that comes with time: "Is this the particular abundance / we've been

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working toward— / the roughed flesh or middle age, / momentary peace that washes over us / in the middle of a task." The last poem of the book, "In the hour of adoration," ends with a passive imperative construction that begins with "let," and this construction has appeared throughout the collection. The last lines of the last poem are: "I praise the quests / and praise the bindings, / the muted endings / and let the voices, / and let the voices." Goodan uses the passive imperative construction, so often found in prayer and meditation, to resurrect the dead and to create a reverse nostalgia, to remember what should not be forgotten. *Let the Voices* is a collection of finely tailored grief and grace.

*A Woman of Property* by Robin Schiff, Penguin Books, 2016 82p, paper \$20.00 • Sixteen poems are in Robin Schiff's third collection, *A Woman of Property*, and they are masterful swirls of mythology, domestic space, and theater. The collection juxtaposes a modern mother with classic female characters such as Iphigenia, Antigone, and Artemis. Schiff

switches easily between narratives, time periods, and definitions.

Schiff's longer poems require an attentive reader, as she stirs several narratives together with language that sometimes upbraids itself: "a few sentences / ago I made the crass point of breaking / 'entertainment' at 'enter,' opening / the word to all / I do not want to go into." Moments like this highlight Schiff's focus on etymology and connotation, allowing her to switch the direction of thought as easily as the wind. Schiff is able to maintain tension across these longer poems because, as poet Kay Ryan has noted, words bring their kith and kin. Schiff's awareness of language is playful and extraordinary. Schiff drops gems such as: "Every time I descend the stairs I / trespass what I already own," and "If poems aren't for saying what goes without / saying, I don't know what they're for" regularly throughout her stanzas. These truths are well-reasoned and wrought.

Reading *A Woman of Property* is not unlike stepping into a modern *Lyrical Ballads*, where the distinction between time and space is compressed, and a lyrical "I" is both expansive and personal. The poem "A Hearing" entwines a dispute over a property line to the events surrounding Iphigenia's sacrificial pyre, asking if a person can own what they have never possessed and daring to rewrite history, where an innocent doe replaces an even more innocent daughter: "It was a deer, / she tells Clytaemestra; a deer / on the altar; your daughter / lives; the wind is still; / and your father / is mortal."

*A Woman of Property* is aware of its matriarchs, women who were property, not capable of owning anything, pawns for capricious gods. The collection roots itself in traditional domestic spaces that women have occupied, but there's something out of place: basements are dilapidated, the nursery chair is broken, gardens are overgrown, all indicating that women are moving beyond being owned and ownership. *A Woman of Property* is an intelligent collection of poems that is equally intricate and vital. Schiff's genius imbues the language and images in each poem, asking us to think it through, then "[t]hink it / with a real blade, now." □