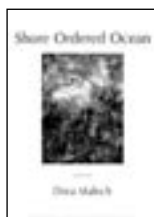


Baby's First Words

By Danielle Sellers

Book Review:

Shore Ordered Ocean, by Dora Malech
Waywiser Press, 2009.



The poems in Dora Malech's first collection, *Shore Ordered Ocean*, are stark, lyrical, and intense. The world Malech creates is almost Pan-like, where grown-ups have minimal roles. Lilacs, fog, and butterfly dust inhabit the environs. Like Pan's, her world is not one without danger. Though there is a kind of heaven present, where "the sun plays / a Game called Spin to Gold," there is also much mention of shadow, purple, and the moon's "un-bridge." In "One Time She Held My Head While I Threw Up Gin on Her Tiles," she relates the story of a girl shot in the face by a man. This is where "the old love songs peel away / their masks to reveal dirges." Like the tide itself, Malech gives her readers the bright love of the moon, then in the next poem, takes it back.

Malech proves herself to be skilled in the realm of magical realism. While no one here is levitating, flying, or turning rabbits into doves, many of the poems in this collection have a similar effect on the reader. Often, words themselves seem to transform in their close relation to each other. For example, in the opening poem, "Let Me Explain," she writes:

I called my eyes near-sighted,
my hands near misses, my arms
close calls, my face old hat

Words morph into their close cousins to make meaning. Another example comes from the poem "Heaven," "...we / slept back to back and woke to swim into / each other. Drove a sweet-smelling scar down / the trunk to smolder in the needles, call in / backup from the wind." She does this blending in several poems,

which creates a sense of fluidity, gives a shimmer to her style “in tangerine, in violet, inviolate.”

Because of the uncertainty of time and space presented here, even the speaker doesn't seem to trust her own intuitions. From the first poem she tells us, “I wore a coat because you can't trust / the weather and I looked like rain.” In this book, the stars are “gun-shy,” new galaxies are birthed and juxtaposed with a baby's first words: “friendly fire.” Reading this book is like a good, strange dream from which you never want to wake.