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DEEP SALT WATER

Marianne Apostolides
Toronto: BookThug, 2017

REVIEWED BY DANIELLE
MCNALLY

Deep Salt Water is a beautiful book. Physically and metaphorically, its material worth is an addition to any collection. Written and composed by Marianne Apostolides, the text is accompanied by the mixed media collages of Catherine Mellinger. Both artists centre the co-existence of the human body alongside the creatures, and creations, of the sea.

The combination of seductive prose and intimate imagery intensifies the readers' experiential learning, and makes for a truly original work. Think colourful sea urchins juxtaposed with pulsing, desiring bodies.

Deep Salt Water is marketed as "a memoir about loss and abortion, expressed through the layering of imagery from the ocean." And delving deeper, it is about coming to terms with (both individual and collective) grief, as Apostolides grapples with her abortion in equal measure to her growing awareness of the destruction of our planet.

It is worth noting from the outset that the author's approach is neither straightforward nor linear: what makes this book special—its creativity and uniqueness—can also have a disorienting effect. The prose is more

poetic than plot-driven: time veers from present-day to first-encounters, and personal experiences are humbled through the politics of oceanic study.

While the writing is incredibly moving, some may find themselves frustrated by temporal shifts. The result is an overflowing sea of emotions that is both fragmentary and riddled with fleshy matter. While this may detract some folks, it will be the crux of interest for others.

I urge readers to engage their senses and journey through these tides of time, for the effort involved in keeping up with Apostolides is always rewarded in kind. The writing is wise and meaningful. Like so:

The orbital angle of the moon will alter and rise. It's an ebb and flow; it's a rhythmic cycle. Tides are predictable. Grief is not. I try to squelch it: cardboard boxes fall apart when they get wet. I haven't asked you to carry the boxes, although they're heavy. You don't need my weakness; you've already got enough on your mind.

Throughout this memoir we encounter Apostolides at many stages of her life. We meet her past self at a clinic to end a pregnancy, as well as in her current state of motherhood, hearing about her daughter's first kiss. Intimacy and fertility are ongoing themes, and where the anatomy is fluid, and the ideas free-flowing, the book is anchored in three parts: organized in accordance with the three trimesters of a pregnancy.

Employing this self/species method of storytelling, Apostolides not only questions her own encounters with termination and embodied trauma, but ties her experiences to bigger quandaries that cloud our collective conscience: What does it mean to bring new life into a world whose resources are finite,

and yet treated as commodities to be exploited? What does it mean to live in the anthropocene, where humans' impact on earth has caused such irreparable damage that we have entered the sixth extinction?

These questions circle the scenarios Apostolides thinks through, as she draws on scientific data to support her claims. The book is well researched, and ends with extensive and thoughtful footnotes in a section titled Further Reading. These concluding passages substantiate the book's narrative.

I think that the brilliance of this book, and the feminist question that it encompasses, is its illustration of the irony of this specifically gendered situation (abortion). Apostolides is suggesting that we shift our attention from inner to outer, in order to highlight the hypocrisy of right-wing anti-abortion legislation. For Apostolides, the "decision" to have an abortion weighs on her psyche and her body long after the procedure, and demonstrates the human capacity for empathy, sorrow, regret, and dismay. I think the underlying message, here, is that this ongoing guilt (embodied by women) is entirely misplaced in the context of our global crisis. I think the book is urging us, rather, to question what structural and cultural practices have made Apostolides' body into a public debate when our biggest life source is quietly degrading at the hands of corporate greed.

This is a book to immerse yourself in, so as to emerge, swelled, with a more compassionate understanding of some of life's most complex questions.

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