
Janice Gould. *Seed*. Headmistress Press, 2019. 75 pp. ISBN: 9781733534505.
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Janice Gould's latest and last collection, *Seed*, compels us to reconsider a need to return to the beginning and to connect that beginning in the formation of a poem to a sense of self, and where the poem may travel. Her words lead you through a personal pilgrimage of a specific beginning for discovering the beauty of language, heartache, and longing. Gould's poetic journey uses language to express the emotion and experience in her struggle to accept her many facets of identity. Reading through each poem also invites a search for truth and acquisition, faith for acceptance, emergence, and discovery, of loss, and resolve. These various poetic expressions then return to a rebirth, a new beginning. The emotional transitions expressed throughout her collection resonate as each poem is recited: finding solace in times of despair and encountering the ever-evading truth—the truth of where she travels and will soon long to bare—missing but always remembering. In this poetic assemblage Gould helps envision a return to her truth and what struggles will be accepted when she finally realized herself in identity—once her identity arrives. To understand her journey, Gould forces us to start with a beginning, "A Poem" (1). The written word Gould displays become the objects and personas that depict her in this collection. Each poem begins with a word title or concept as a benediction over each poem. This idea of benediction conveys her journey as a sojourner in each place and time. This journey ends with the poem "Beyond Knowing" which brings her back to the beginning where this search through despair circles back to the books beginning, "Looking / is the beginning / of seeing..." (67). Each poem is a small prayer saving a place for solace, for resolve.

I had the pleasure to be on a panel with Gould during the Jaipur Literary Festival in Boulder, Colorado, "Orientations: Writing Sexuality" on September 25, 2017, and to read alongside her at the Counterpath, "In Conversation with Colorado Front Range Native Writers & Scholars, Series II" on September 17, 2017. During these times we spoke about poetry and identity. She sang a few songs, she played her guitar, and we talked some more. Her words are like her songs, easy on the ears, with the despair hiding behind the soft language conveying so much of herself. Gould continuously seeks truth and honesty. In her poem "Contradiction" she constantly searches through the expectation of identity, she often sacrifices herself and doubts her identity, not expressing how she was meant or intended to exist. Always "naming herself as silence" (41). "A Poem" (1) states this beginning

is about to flower
full force from my abdomen,
my spleen, my wrists,
my ankles. I could feel
the pip of it in last night's dream
that kept threading its way
back to sacred land, ... (1)

Expressed in these words is the presence of a beginning that points out a specific place of emergence, "her abdomen." The area she describes does lead all to a place of "sacred land," where the emergence of existence stems (1). The recognition of such a place also recognizes the beauty, the purity of poetry. Knowing the body is a large part of acknowledging herself in these poems, where she travels and connects to places as a germinating memorial to land, to the body, to time, and to resolve. Using the "seed" as a metaphor allows us to view the minuscule interconnectedness between the soil and seed. The offering and receiving of life "unconditionally" (3). This point of origin is a reference point to allow herself to travel and remember the complex existence and relationships in her poems.

The concept of emergence and becoming lends an urgency to the acknowledgment of self and place. In the poem "Weed," her words express the delicateness of self and place. Comparing herself as a "weed in your perfect garden" is an example of the delicate interconnectedness of self and place (6). Gould acknowledges this instance and finds value in what is inherently something natural as itself, the value, meaning, and purpose in a "weed" and a "rose":

After that I grew intentionally,
absorbing every drop
of moisture that fell
from her leaves, droplet
by droplet, onto the thirsty
patch of soil that sustains me. (6)

Gould speaks often about the identity of self, placing each poem in moments of recollection. These recollections are like "migrations" and habitual patterns solidified on a landscape, such as a river, or a canyon, or animal trail. Many of these formations or events take place in small moments which happen over time, some carved over a millennium, some in a drizzle of "feminine" rain (11). The language Gould captures

places her in these spatial patterns to let us know the controlling nature of who she is and who we are as a habit, carving its way through history and this world. Her poem, "Migration," is an example of this historical habit:

Too worn down to celebrate
Our freedom, we vanish quickly
Like Indians, making our way
North and west, rattling
Down the highway
In an oversized truck. (9)

This notion of self and placement is indicated in many places of her collection. Like a grotto, a place to contemplate. Inside the lingual moments are the remembrances of comfort, the embraces—that offer tenderness and peace. Identity is a theme throughout her collection. The identity of the female, Lesbian, Person of Color, and as a "tomboy" is represented as a "contradiction" (41). Gould depicts the constraints of honesty and truth towards "self" and identity. The expectation of decorum and how others see her adoration for what her heart wants and seeks. Her spirit seeks freedom away from despair and from not being able to express her true self. Gould envisioning herself existing in this immense universe but only remembering the tiny moments that make the most differences in her life such as a "wall in the garden," or "feeling the night wind on our faces" (17). Awareness is the virtue that pushes her to continue moving forward and adapting to a better self. In this constant pull in identity she "calls her name silence in a stance, tantalized by another girl's grace" (42). The concept of place and spiritual acceptance and the constant justification of her identity as a sin for being a lesbian is the ongoing struggle Gould encounters often. Whether in Idaho as a child feeling the snow on her face and melding into it(43), or in the valleys of Oregon remembering the interaction and negative response from her friend's mother as "disgusting" (49), Gould challenges the tension through contemplation and meditation. The contemplation leads to faith and resolve of spiritual acceptance through things unnoticed, today—"trees, water, music" (57).

The concept of place has a sacred space in this collection, the discovery, and connection to everything beautiful. Taking moments and willingly allowing herself to watch a day unfold and letting that motion become part of her being. Recognizing there is beauty all around and "observing the fiery residue" (58). In this moment of acceptance, Gould experiences a connection to faith towards trust intertwining with "beauty all around and spiraling out like happiness" (59). This concept of whirling

beauty in all is the direction that leads her to sacred places where she can contemplate natural beauty and sanctuary. Gould references Chimayó, which is also the title of her poem, and the small sanctuary in New Mexico. This place of solace helps resolve her struggle for love and longing inside herself and to those she loves—to a constant search and commitment towards the truth about herself inside the recognition of beauty (24). The heaviness of miracles and persistence through time and memory hold a sacredness allowing a moment of awareness and belonging to a holy sacredness on the breezes and patio singing praises for all love (25). Gould addresses life consistently happening and noticing life as it consistently happens, never missing moments because those moments can escape us. She also wants us to notice the small, especially those in the dark and dank because everything wants to be noticed (15).

The last poem of the collection is a reverent poem called “Beyond Knowing.” In this poem, Gould reverts to the beginning, specifically her epigraph from Marilou Awaikta’s novel 1994 *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother’s Wisdom*: “A Cherokee elder told me, ‘Look at everything three times. Once with the right eye. Once with the left eye. And once from the corners of the eyes to see the spirit [essence] of what you’re looking at’” (epigraph). The return to a beginning and opening the poem with a similar language is the conceptual idea Gould wants the reader to realize. The importance of returning to places that mold and allow her to reflect, contemplate, and meditate on a pilgrimage through life. Returning to specific memories is a return to “poetry” (67). Returning to a beginning is a kind of rebirth—or renewal. A journey without reflection is a “denunciation of self” (67). The pilgrimage through the corridors of life, if we choose to acknowledge life, allows us to look all around and notice the unnoticeable. The “intention of looking beyond the curvatures of the earth” and beyond the “blue sky” is part of the faith she seeks and the truth that sustains the search (67). “Integument” is the idea of becoming grounded in who she is (67). Becoming the seed that will germinate unconditionally, recognizing the “small truths” and blending with the light of the sun (68). *Seed* is a heartfelt and honest journey of reflection, longing, and discovery. The last poetic testament left with us, Gould sows a collection worthy of continued growth and harvest.

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