



Review of Richard Jeffrey Newman, *The Silence of Men: Poems* (Fort Lee, NJ: CavanKerry Press, 2006), xv + 104 pp.

William G. Doty

This is a fairly hard volume to read. Not because the poetry is bad: it has moments of epiphany and insight many writers would love to produce, but because the materials and themes are so close to the bone. Readers will experience a great deal of various sexual connections, many sad moments of loss and confusion.

Its strength is in its oh-so-direct confrontations with male sexuality from several directions: an older neighbor seeking a blowjob, the author's brother and he exploring the same ("*how could you let someone / pee in your mouth?*" p. 17). Abortion as well (p. 67), and what seems like incest (p. 68), and anal rape (p. 74).

An account of male:female intercourse (p. 12f) is hilarious: the male puzzles through his first use of a condom (come on now!), dropping it onto a dusty floor before drawing on a second rubber. But the author can speak brilliantly the kaddish prayer for his departed brother—killed at nineteen by a drunken driver. And Jewish-Christian-Islamic tensions reappear (pp. 52, 63) so well as contemporary political defamations of George W. Bush's invasion of the sovereign state of Iraq (p. 8).

Family rears its weighty head repeatedly, in a manner that usefully highlights how sexuality so largely derives from familial attitudes. Social construction of reality begins in the cradle, and Newman's poems return repeatedly to this theme, even though it leads so often to "The silence between us [which] is the silence of men" (p. 72). Here "disfigured manhood" becomes precisely an indicator of what we might term "disfigured humanhood," for I could imagine such a volume (perhaps I've read it already) being written from a woman's perspective.

A rather intense element here of dismay and pessimism, yet as well a sense of having learned wisdom that can open doors to new futures, witness the tiny piece, "Catching My Breath" (p. 93):

My body has learned many lies,
but here, in this bed we share,
they fall from me till I am clean,
a tree in winter,
awaiting the new season.

And the last words of the volume (“Poem From The Barnes and Noble Café,” p. 100):

the earth transformed to a tent where we all break bread,
each of us carrying what we’ve seen
the way musicians carry music
in the moments before they start playing.

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