

A Good Man is Hard to Find—But Good Sense Can Prevail

by Harry Brown

I am pleased to review *Fits of Wrath and Irony* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), a fine first poetry collection by Deana Nantz, who holds three degrees in English from Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), the latest an MFA in Creative Writing. She teaches English at North Laurel High School, and also teaches as adjunct in English at EKU's Corbin Campus.

Nantz uses excellent detail—sharp, appropriate, telling, sometimes ironic or satirical. We see real persons in real settings—herself, a teacher, speeding to work; a young Pentecostal woman praying for a husband; a body building boyfriend. Consider these strong lines with first-rate imagery, illustrating respectively the preceding examples:

I'm the mule of the world.

I am woman—a fiery ball of anxiety,
gripping steering wheel, holding a cup of whoop-ass,
tailing a yellow school bus—heading straight to hell. (“Whitman’s Teacher” 18-21)

My fortunate female friends
don spouses and white fences.
But I’m unpicked like a fat girl at prom
wearing a borrowed dress
ten years too old for Goodwill’s dumpster. (“Prayer from the Skirt” 5-9)

Here you come gleaming in
with tight t-shirt and pecks flexing.
I feel insecure,
seeing that yours are bigger. (“Steroid” 1-4)

As my colleague Julie Hensley emphasized, “She has attitude.” And original figures of speech.

Fits of Wrath and Irony contains a broad spectrum of subjects ranging from the poet herself as “a scraggly pine” (“Pine Seed” 2) to high school students taking their final exam, Nantz’s pet Ms. Kitty, an April storm, and Ernest Hemingway. The second most important subject in the collection is the poet’s grandparents, her experiences

with them recalled in admiration and affection. In “Birthday Present” about her grandmother’s eightieth birthday party, Nantz recalls that when she suffered from colic as an infant, her grandmother “slept by my side on a scratchy couch” (12): “But that was my gift—to have the matriarch. / I’d take you over the Magi any day” (13-14). In “Leaves of Maple,” the poet recalls her grandfather’s “fixing hands that carried me inside / from bee stings and sprained ankles” (13-14), and longs “to see / a knotty head bent down to task” (30-31) in his “clapboard building” (4). In a touching stanza she wishes “just one more time” to “wrap my arms / around a stiff collared, sleeveless shirt” (32-34).

The dominant subject in *Fits of Wrath and Irony* is the persona’s gender struggle with several boyfriends, the series concluding with a fulfilling relationship and concomitant new sense of self described in the final lines from “Change of Motion”:

Autumn prepares a path to clarity
 where all is bare and clean.
 Standing in front of you,
 the fall of my old world—
 I wax naked and new. (12-16)

I suspect that these lines owe something to the final scene in Chopin’s *The Awakening*, but the speaker’s experience and attitude here are the opposite of Edna Pontellier’s.

It’s a bit surprising that Nantz’s persona could have such luck with several suitors before her happy discovery. Consider, for example, the subject of this Freudian passage from “Bedroom Psychology”:

I want to reach over and rip off
 all your old girlfriends, the love affair with your mother,
 and the first time your father rendered you impotent
 in front of her. (1-4)

Or this well-to-do façade in the opening lines of “Lasagna”:

I sit here in this Italian restaurant with a man who’s paying for my meal.
 Skinny six-figure fellow with poofy hair and shiny shoes,
 he’s wearing church clothes and a mask. (1-3)

Or the overbearing fiancé in “Why I Left You Two Weeks before Our Wedding” who, along with his parents, picked out “a musty rental” (1) near his parents’ home, and bought “a suitable marriage bed of . . . [his] choice” (17-18). In the end—or, rather, in a new beginning—the book’s persona once more exercised good sense, and finally found and made good fortune. I wish her well.