



“Purgatory has an Address” is a poetry chapbook of about 60 pages. Although it could be read in a sitting, when I read collections of poetry, I like to read one or two poems a day. I like to see how they affect or color what I experience as I move through the world.

“Purgatory” is very much a book of poetry of place--one’s place in the world, in the community, and in the family. In this, it addresses adoption, racial issues, and even the Santa Ana winds that Inland Southern California is so well known for. It takes quite a talent to pull these diverse subjects together thematically, yet Washington is more than up to the task.

Each of these lyrical poems engaged my intellect and my senses. I especially related to “Gargoyles and Goddesses” for its strange empowerment in the face of social ostracism; “Your Mother was a Good Catholic Girl” for the irony of how that plays out; “Nameless” and “Fill in the Blanks” for the lonely secrecy that surrounds adoption. The many poems that detail inland California’s environment--its winds and deserts included--spoke to me about the terror and beauty of this place. I often think ‘I’m a cactus.’ In “Saguaro,” Washington beautifully elucidates what’s good about that.

Bringing personalities and environment into balance, the poem “Cul-de-sac is French” reminded me: “She believed in/Balance/Plants Italian Cypress/In between Oleanders//Evergreen finger/Pointing skyward/Taller than/Pink and white blossoms/Barbed wire fences//Our eyes travel upward/ Recognizing hope/When we see it.”

The concluding poem “at the end of the devil’s breath,” vividly shows the effect of the Santa Ana winds, again in balance, how it “claws skin with its vicious teeth” while it threatens windows and breaks trees. And yet it clears the sky so that the narrator finds a “postcard miracle” of “snow cap crisp sky.”

“If it weren’t for the devil’s breath,/I’d never know where we are, and/Just how beautiful.”

-Victoria Waddle, author of *Acts of Contrition*