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Gorgeous Mourning

Poetry by Alice Jones

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In a time when poetry books tend toward a frustrating sameness of form, Alice Jones' *Gorgeous Mourning* is up to something different. Even the table of contents is refreshingly oddball, consisting of three slender, yet bricklike columns, each built of one-word titles and their page numbers (Believe : 31). Structured as a series of prose poems (simply put, short poems written in paragraph form) the book closely considers seventy-two words ("Whirl," "Bristle," "Mooch"), one to a page, in all their possibilities.

Gorgeous Morning is an extended run of verbal mischief. But it's a serious wordplay, play with a purpose, whimsy on a mission. Jones fearlessly follows language wherever, and however swiftly, it takes her. But she is not looking to waste the day away. She means to end up somewhere a little nearer the heart of the world, a little closer to what it is to be alive on earth, with the strange refrain of your own life running always through your head. The volume's title, with its (morning/mourning) play on words, would seem to suggest that language always means something more, or other, than it appears to, and that meaning (whether of a word or of an experience) moves so swiftly that once you arrive at it, cross the beautiful "morning" toward it, much has already escaped, resisted definition, or been lost, and you can only stand there "mourning" your own certainties—the word you were sure you knew, the life you thought you wanted.

The words Jones chooses ("Flout," "Bolt," "Gallop") are shakers and movers, and the stand-alone title positions she assigns them so confidently lend them an exhortatory air, as if each one is an urgent instruction to the reader, a necessary call to action: "Concentrate," "Swallow," "Climb." And you do, following after her as she chases those fleet-footed terms down whatever paths they take. Often Jones brazenly free associates in an aural way, from sound to sound to sound, down the (not for beginners) trail, not even winded and drinking in meaning at a great rate as she goes: the poem "Ring" sprints from the word "mister" to "hysteria" to "history" to "listeria" and on and on, finally stopping before "Some bells on the mute jester's hat."

In "Enter," one of the briefest and most straightforward poems of this inventive volume, Jones issues the reader an invitation, impossible to resist, to her engaging and idiosyncratic way of seeing, to a housewarming, so to speak, for all the gorgeous words that take up residence in her head:

Spring is in full swing: the house is swarming with electricians.
I've fallen in love with two lips. Not a peep from the past.

Everything, now. Our new gate light; new doorbell sings—
come in.

— Ann Stapleton