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Patriarca, Gianna. *To the Men Who Write Goodbye Letters*. Toronto: Inanna, 2020. Pp. 87. \$18.95.

Prolific poet, witness, and voice of the stories of Italian-Canadian immigration, Gianna Patriarca has given us verse and narrative accounts of immigrant women's lived realities in her eight books of poems and her collection of short stories. Since her 1994 volume *Italian Women and Other Tragedies* (Guernica Editions), she has explored the power of language in rescuing silenced existences as well as the experiences of Italian-Canadian women, some of which have been marked by patriarchal violence, as for example in her powerful collection of short stories *All My Fallen Angelas* (Inanna, 2016). Following the success of her prose writing, Patriarca has returned to poetry with a more intimate voice. In keeping with the stylistic experimentation that characterized her earlier verse, she has crafted a poetic language peopled with ellipses, silences, disjunctions, and suspensions. Lack, disconnection, tensions, and the arbitrariness of life, chance, and luck are themes that run through her work, as well as the influences of family ties and her own Italian heritage.

Published with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, this volume of poetry foregrounds loss and literary creation. Dedicated to the memory of her deceased parents, friends, and loved ones, it is prefaced by two epigraphs: the first one by Anthony Bourdain and the second by Margaret Laurence, the two generating a sharp contrast between the crude language of sudden death and the power of poetic creation. Life, in its finitude and unpredictability, is represented through a poetic language that shapes the everyday, as Patriarca's introductory verses point out:

Among the pages
find a life
as ordinary as any life
as splendid as any life
all of this
in one good poem. (xi)

The poems that follow begin with "Die so I Can Write About It," which points to the severed ties of a tumultuous relationship with a loved one whose acts demand forgiveness and forgetfulness, two emotions that suffuse the entire volume. This poem creates a thematic bridge with Patriarca's previous books. The intense fragmentation, the short lines, and the use of an

everyday prosaic lexicon involve the readers in the creation of meaning, the salvaging of shards of existence that emerge from severed relationships. Family and emotional ties, linguistic reminiscences, domestic objects, and street names all emerge in these poems to reveal the sense of irrevocable loss with which Patriarca writes about her past, her youth, her parents, and her country of origin.

The title of the collection, with its evocative tone, acquires meaning in the last composition of the volume's first part, which bears the same title as the whole book. There, the sense of absence that pervades most of the poems becomes especially evident, as we encounter the past, what was not, the choices not made, the roads not travelled, a sense of nostalgia for a time long gone. Death and the end of relationships prompt elegiac meditation but so too do the materiality of existence and the evocative presence of everyday objects: an espresso machine, a typewriter, a "crimson red/ with white polka dot" scarf ("On Cumberland," 43) mix with reflections on poetic creation in "ingenious assemblies of vibrations" ("Prodigies," 29), which evoke the affordances of vibrant matter as theorized by Jane Bennet in thing theory. Indeed, in Patriarca's poetic world, objects as well as the physicality of language are powerful influences, as the fragments merge and find poetic expression in a tension between memories of childhood and encounters with old age. In the central part of the book, "Parts of Her," her own Ciociarian dialect finds expression in two poems, "Denter a stà cucina" and "Stamattina," which are a tribute to her own mother, whose existence was spent inside the kitchen.

In this volume, the protagonists are no longer "the women who were born to give birth," as Patriarca characterizes them in her famous poem "The Italian Women," but their daughters, who carry the memory of them. The generative power of those Italian women who were once young and in love and then lived for their families remains alive in the language of those who survive them. In the present tense of the verses, their daughters – severed from a language that died with their own progenitors, while confronting the finitude of their own existence – speak up in bilingual verses because "quando è morta mamma/ è morta anche la nostra lingua" ("when my mother died/so did our language"; "Lingua," 71, "Language," 69). Maternal loss plays an important role in the third part of this volume, in which the maternal is bound up with a linguistic heritage preserved "nel limbo del mio ventre" ("in the limbo of my gut"; "Lingua," 71, "Language," 70).

A somber tone presides over most of these poems, infused as they are with Patriarca's grief, especially for the loss of her mother, to whom so many

of the book's compositions are devoted. Confronting her own old age and the unexpected end of life is the topic of "They Tell Me," in which not only the poet's red high-heeled shoes have to be placed in boxes for donations but also her own possessions, the photographs that her grandchildren will inherit. Written from a daughterly perspective, the verses of Patriarca's latest book attest to the power of what Ugo Foscolo termed "eredità di affetti," a legacy of affections that, in this volume, finds poetic expression in an intertextual relationship with the verses of Italian and North American poets. Written in an evocative language, this moving collection addresses themes we have grown more acutely aware of during these years of the COVID-19 pandemic: the passing of time, the loss of loved ones, but also the therapeutic power of artistic creation.

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