

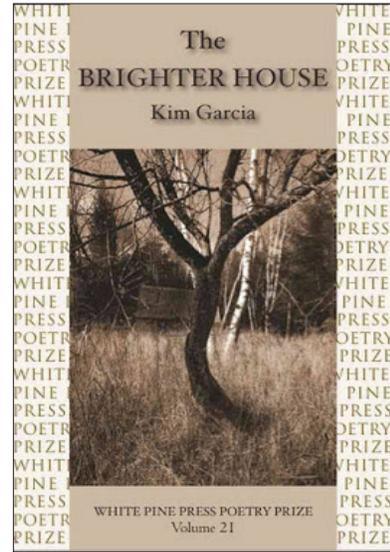
**The Brighter House**  
**By Kim Garcia**  
**White Pine Press Poetry Prize Volume 21**

*Review by Kate Hanson Foster*

**W**illiam Wordsworth wrote in his poem, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality and Recollections of Early Childhood" that we are but "trailing clouds of glory..." and boldly declared, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" Wordsworth believed that children are wise and celestial, and as we grow we veer further and further from our divine selves. In her collection, *The Brighter House*, Kim Garcia suggests the opposite—that we are not de-spiritualized with age, and instead describes a personal transition from uneasy earthly child to heavenly poet. "Who can say what is a blessing?" says the speaker in the poem, "In the beginning was all the after." "I am blessed with curses." Childhood, for all its pains and progressions, is a universal human phase we all must go through, and for some, an innocent child can be exposed to not so innocent circumstances. For some, as the poet suggests, the "beginning" starts in the "after."

*The Brighter House* contains poems that ruminate over childhood wounds—most of which are centered on an abusive father and the psychological imprint left on his daughters. There are several "Tales of the Sisters" poems strewn throughout the collection—various scenes of three young girls: the speaker, one "light sister" and one "dark sister," implying that the abuse each withstood had its own individual impacts.

The poems are rich in metaphor, creating a more sensory experience—a place where lyrics can do what prose cannot. There is no clear narrative present, and the reader can only guess the concrete details in the stories. In "Transfusion, 2p.m." the speaker describes her ailing father by saying, "I cannot find in myself a single hard word against the sturdy weave of sentiment or any human grasping." Perhaps this desire for the right word or words could explain the many reoccurring images in the collection. There are "wriggling legs" of a child and "wriggling bodies" of frogs—two separate scenes in two separate poems, both describing a squirming out of something difficult. Other images frequent the book as well (i.e. water, darkness, dust, clouds) and yet there isn't a sense of redundancy in these familiar words, instead a sort of strategy of meditation—returning and evaluating the same memories and ideas in order to travel from dark to light. But what if the mind is a "mind full of tar...almost solid or suggests a solid, as mercury suggests steel, and these clouds stones." ("It's Simpler) The poet cannot dwell in this space forever—and admits, "If I were dying/tomorrow I would be bitter I would/ buy a brighter house. I would leave bad/memories. I would be the brighter house." ("Aubade") There is acceptance of the events that transpired—a new awareness and



## Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

ultimately even forgiveness and peace. The speaker proclaims, "I am saying yes. Not to death, which isn't my business, but to heaven," implying that heaven is something that doesn't have to come after death. There can be a blessed afterlife following childhood, a spiritual transcendence when you climb the dark stairs to something lighter—A Wordsworthian might even agree with that.