

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

Starving Moon
By Luke Salisbury
Millennium Resolution
By Jean Dany Joachim
JEBCA Editions
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Review by Dennis Daly

Love and friendship in times of license and freedom often go amiss, derailed by life's pedestrian complications. Prescribed relationships, on the other hand, monitored by their context in society and tempered by existential considerations or overarching cultural institutions reduce the tragedy and drama in everyday life to an acceptable expectation level. There's the rub. Unpredictable extremes of behavior make life not only more interesting, but also, infused by unwieldy passion, more creative.

In this dual publication *Starving Moon/ Millennium Resolution* writer Luke Salisbury and poet Jean Dany Joachim set up a compelling proposition and a stunning response with verve and spot-on tonality. Salisbury expertly provides the proposition in the form of a well-wrought short story. Joachim completes the narrative with a free verse poem that delivers an odd but very unique physicality. Together both literary pieces combine into a rather heartfelt, unified, and, more importantly, mesmerizing story.

The action takes place "in the summer of 1972, which was really the last summer of the sixties." Sex, rock and roll, some drugs, and a lot of booze abound. Primarily Salisbury chronicles two couples in their evolving/ degrading relationships: Mark (the narrator) and his new love, Carol; and Peter and Gretchen, the star-crossed couple. All have histories, although Gretchen's is particularly vague. Damaged people meet lesser damaged people and cling. Doo-wop, Del Shannon, and Sam Cooke are piped into the mnemonic sound system at appropriate times adding to the texture.

While one relationship evolves, the other is toxic and spirals downward. True love offers up the irony, since both relationships have it. Friendships are woven-in complications. The character of Carol really amuses me. She is a straight-talking corrective to her boyfriend, Mark the narrator. I must say, this plot line works wonderfully well.

One exquisite section of prose sticks with me as I write this. Salisbury speaks of love's demise not as a loss of sentiment and passion, but rather the dissolution of a dynamic, a world view. He explains that everyone knows this to be true. That seems right somehow. Here's the section,

*... Time is dead. The
person you love, the person you know, isn't there
anymore. Isn't here. Isn't yours. You're not really
here either. You're in limbo because you're
together but you're not. You're alone. But you'll
be more alone. You hurt. But you'll hurt more.
The past won't save you. Things don't work*

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anymore and you can't do anything about it. The person you love, the body you can't imagine being without or touching someone else, is a ghost. You touch it but you aren't touching it. You're a ghost. Objects, chairs, cars, snow, don't look the same. Buildings, trees, the sky, get super real. The outline of things gets too sharp. You know what's coming...

Just how alone are we in this world? Salisbury pretty much ends his story meditating on this question. His protagonist/ narrator watches through memory's window as life's stories replicate, perhaps changing slightly, over twenty years until things make sense. Although this narrative is far from being a comedy, it does have a comic outlook where acceptance, not remedial change, proffers resolution.

Embedded in Salisbury's short story, Joachim's poetic persona comments through the medium of his poem, entitled Millennium Resolution, identifying with one of the characters, Peter, and vowing to change the pattern of his own life. In the background bells toll from the tower of Trinity Church on St. Catherine Street in downtown Montreal. Consider these lines in the heart of the poem,

*I was already swallowed by the "Starving Moon"
A cold chill filled my whole body,
That kind one experiences in very scary moments
The same kind immigrants often feel
When dealing with immigration agents
I discovered myself in the pages of the story:
I had Peter's face
So obsessed with doing the right thing,
And wanting to be Jesus too — In this fast moving
World.*

The poet ties himself even closer to Salisbury's Peter character in the penultimate stanza of his piece. He signals a new understanding before the millennium,

*Peter went to another woman,
Peter went back to Gretchen,
And Peter never noticed Peter
The way I missed myself for so long
There were only two rings left
Of the twelve sounds of midnight
The first hour was almost final...*

Both Salisbury and Joachim are well known literati in the Boston area. Salisbury is the author of *Baseball Is the Answer* and three other works of fiction. Joachim is a past Poet Populist of Cambridge, Massachusetts and the author of three collections of poetry. They are currently selling this book at readings. If you are in the northeast area, track them down. For God's sake stalk them. Get this book.