

Prayer For The Misbegotten
by Julia Carlson,
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Review by Lee Varon

IN HER NEW COLLECTION of poetry, "Prayer For The Misbegotten," Julia Carlson takes us on a journey. I delighted in this journey as Carlson brought me fresh perspectives and opened new vistas. In the first poem in the collection, "October," she begins this journey: "...we walk on/ from season to season/ our thoughts stiff and heavy/ betrayed/ by the autumn sun/ slipping faster every day."

There were so many gems in this collection but many of my favorites were set in far off landscapes. In the poem, "Gare, Villeneuve-Sur-Lot," she brings us to the idyllic "Sunflower fields" in the south of France and yet the scene suddenly turns dark as the poet notices a plaque at the train station "From here, in 1943, 50,000 Jews/ Were sent to prison camps."

Carlson closely observes the world and she invites her readers to do the same. Things are not always as they appear on the surface. The sinister and tragic often lurk at a deeper level. In "Spring In Rome," we smell the "odor of honey grass/ From high windows" and yet "Sin swells the air." Reading this poem, I couldn't help thinking of the sexual abuse scandals that have rocked the Catholic Church behind its opulent surface.

In the ekphrastic poem, "At The Museum," Carlson muses on the scene behind the 15th century painting of an engagement banquet. Behind this flowery scene of a wealthy affianced couple, the poet shows us another scene in the background: "a woman, shift torn/ Perhaps a peasant or a slave/ Runs for her life from a mounted warrior." Carlson asks the chilling question about the young woman about to marry: "What will happen to her/ If she does not, in all ways, submit."

There are also more intimate, psychological poems in this collection, such as "Eyes" which is a poem of unrequited love where: "If your eyes did not speak/ I would never have thought/ About you or us..." We are left with the wistful poignancy of this love that bore fruit and yet was deeply felt.

In one of the final poems in this collection, Carlson explores growing older as in "Ague," where the poem ends "...my mind still courts love's arrows/ As my body slowly turns to gone." As a reader I felt I had full circle in this scintillating poetic journey.

