

Beauty and Beyond: Songs of Small Mercies

by Lorraine Gane

Lantzville, BC: Leaf Press, 2012, 15pp., \$10.00 paper.

Reviewed by Tanya Lester

Is it possible to see beauty in everything? When the reader peers through Lorraine Gane's poetic lens in *Beauty and Beyond: Songs of Small Mercies*, it does.

This is far from surprising for recipients on Gane's email list. Once a month, they are buoyed by a poetry offering that she sends from her home on Salt Spring Island, BC. Often one of her lyrical poems sings to the soul about gorgeous things she discovers in nature.

In this chapbook, though, the poems underline Gane's ability to go further on her endless quest for beauty. Often she quotes other poets' words and uses them to slide into her own lyrical lines:

*Everywhere you look
there's beauty and it's rimed with death
– Jan Zwicky*

*On the path
the black bird with red eyes
sings what is beyond naming*

There is generosity in Gane's use of other poets' words because she is an accomplished poet herself, with two previous chapbooks and two full-length books of poetry – *Even the Slightest Touch*, *Thunders on My Skin* and *Threshold* – to her name for which she has garnered award recognition.

No wonder, as is shown in this chapbook in lines like these:

*This afternoon a black sky moves in, sudden shower,
tongues of rhododendrons licking the rain*

In another poem, Gane shows the beauty of survival gratitude:

*In the death camps at Auschwitz and Dachau
Vicktor Frankl found beauty floating
in a bowl of watery soup – a fish head for flavor
with a few peas from the bottom of the pot . . .*

Death itself, Gane illustrates, can illuminate the beauty of “the light in your face,” and chemotherapy treatments can spawn the loving beauty “of a small heart on his skin.”

This poet courageously writes in this work's only titled poem, “Letter from Japan,” about some of the positive aftermath from the recent earthquake:

*. . . it was the beauty that lingered:
the quiet of the streets at night without cars . . .
Even the night sky looked different,*

*brimming with stars when before we could only see a few . . .
. . . this birthing is hard, and yet magnificent.*

Death and what surrounds it is a topic Gane has dealt with often before. In *Even the Slightest Touch Thunders on My Skin*, for example, the poems are heart-achingly painful as Gane chronicles the death from cancer of her fiancé. Now, in *Beauty and Beyond: Songs of Small Mercies*, the “small mercies” are in some of her words that communicate the possibility that there are reasons for the pain and that if beauty can reveal itself, we can start to go beyond it. There is hope in this.

Although Gane has a journalism degree from Carleton University, her poetry takes painful life situations much further in poetry than is possible in news stories. She cares, and this quality shines through in every line, regardless of varied styles. Beauty is taken beyond to a virtuous and sacred place.

Gane’s poems have the ability to make the reader stop, catch his or her breath and savour the words she offers. She reminds us that beauty is the essence of poetry.

This chapbook is among many that have seen the light of day due to the innovative vision of Ursula Vaira, who founded Leaf Press as a poetry chapbook publishing house in 2001. Located in Lantzville, BC, Vaira began publishing trade poetry books in 2007 while continuing to add to her chapbook line as well as poem leaflets and the weekly on-line Monday’s Poem. ☘

Tanya Lester’s book reviews have been published in *Malahat Review*, *Book Buddies* and *The Gulf Islands Driftwood* as well as in *Prairie Review of Books*.