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Sunday, May 03, 2020

Bookish Thoughts: Girls Like Us: Poems by Elizabeth Hazen

Rhyme relies on repetition: pink drink, big wig, tramp stamp, rank skank.
[Opening of "Devices" from *Girls Like Us*]

Girls Like Us: Poems by Elizabeth Hazen

Alan Squire Press, 2020

Poetry; 72 pgs

Girls Like Us is packed with fierce, eloquent, and deeply intelligent poetry focused on female identity and the contradictory personas women are expected to embody. The women in these poems sometimes fear and sometimes knowingly provoke the male gaze. At times, they try to reconcile themselves to the violence that such attentions may bring; at others, they actively defy it. Hazen's insights into the conflict between desire and wholeness, between self and self-destruction, are harrowing and wise. The predicaments confronted in Girls Like Us are age-old and universal—but in our current era, Hazen's work has a particular weight, power, and value. [Book Synopsis]



It has been awhile since I last took part in a book tour. I decided to give *Girls Like Us* a try after reading the blurb. I like poetry that delves into women's issues and looks at them from different vantage points. Given our current situation of sheltering in place and my struggle to focus on reading for long, poetry seems to be where I am finding my solace the most—at least reading-wise.

This was my first experience reading Elizabeth Hazen's poetry, and I was immediately taken with the poet's concise and thoughtful prose. I liked how multi-faceted her poetry is in terms of the different directions she takes it and is able to capture ideas and memories in a real and personal way. I think many women will see themselves in her poems to some extent.

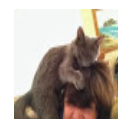
The collection opens with a poem called "Devices" which I think was the perfect start both for its immediate shock value and the truth in her words. She pulls no punches, as you can see in the opening line at the beginning of this post. The ending sums it up so well:

*We've been called so many things that we are not,
we startle at the sound of our own names.*

This may be me putting my own spin on it, but Hazen's poem "Diagnosis I" is one I identified with right away, as someone who has sought medical attention at one time or another and had my symptoms be dismissed rather than taken seriously:

*[...] in his preacher's
tenor, the doctor insisted
I had no cause for pain.*

Contributors



Literary Feline

California, United States

At the age of five, Literary Feline (aka Wendy) was diagnosed as a fabulavore.

Due to the low story content of movies and television, she has required a steady supply of books to provide her sustenance. She currently resides in California with her loving husband, adorable daughter, and two affectionate and sassy cats. Literary Feline has broadened her nutritional sources by reviewing books. Please note: Literary Feline is not a bibliovore. She's not eating the books for goodness' sake.

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One of my favorite poems in the collection is "Lucky Girl" I just love the way the words come together and the images they elicit:

*Everyone reassures me that I'm not
as bad as the worst thing
I've done. Nothing*

*is ever black and white.
Even the made bed is just
a precursor to disorder.*

and later this also from "Lucky Girl:"

*the seduction of a lie,
the way it tastes like whiskey, dark
and heavy [...]*

Then there is Hazen's beautiful poem "Dream" in which she writes about a trapped hummingbird, or rather, a metaphor for something else entirely--and completely relatable as dreams often are:

*An anticlimax of
release, she flaps just*

*as before, but stays
improbably in place.*

I think my favorite of all the poems in the collection thought was one called "Electricity," which spoke to both the daughter and mother in me:

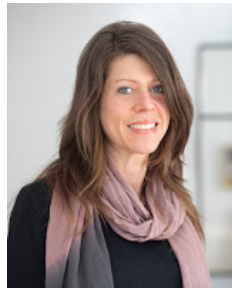
*there was no keeping her.
Now, my own strumming*

*fingers soothe my son,
though my mind's a clutter*

*of charges, eighty wingbeats
per second. I lie until his*

*breath deepens and the ticking
clock becomes a heartbeat.*

Overall this is a rich and meaningful collection of poetry that I am glad I took a chance on. I walked away from the collection knowing it will be one I return to again and again.



About the Author:

Elizabeth Hazen is a poet, essayist, and teacher. A Maryland native, she came of age in a suburb of Washington, D.C. in the pre-internet, grunge-tinted 1990s, when women were riding the third wave of feminism and fighting the accompanying backlash. She began writing poems when she was in middle school, after a kind-hearted librarian handed her Lawrence Ferlinghetti's A Coney Island of the Mind. She has been reading and writing poems ever since.

Hazen's work explores issues of addiction, mental health, and sexual trauma, as well as the restorative power of love and forgiveness. Her poems have appeared in Best American Poetry, American Literary Review, Shenandoah, Southwest Review, The Threepenny Review, The Normal School, and other journals. Alan Squire Publishing released her first book, Chaos Theories, in 2016. Girls Like Us is her second collection. She lives in Baltimore with her family.

To learn more about Elizabeth Hazen, and her book, please visit the [author's website](#).

If you would like to win a copy of *Girls Like Us*, please check out the [Rafflecopter giveaway](#)

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