

Visionware
Caridad Moro-McCormick
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Perhaps because my own poetry tends toward the narrative (and long), I am most drawn to those poems with strong, definitive narrative structures—poems that, under different conditions, could very well be works of flash or short, short fiction. For someone of my aesthetic sensibilities, Caridad Moro-McCormick's exquisite *Visionware* is a rare treat. In just twenty-two poems, Moro-McCormick gives us stories from her life ranging from grappling with racism in a white-dominated community, growing up poor in an immigrant community, living in a loveless heterosexual marriage, and entering into an affair with another trapped wife. At turns heartbreaking, humorous, and triumphant, the stories she tells are always engaging, always precise, and always affecting.

Moro-McCormick opens her chapbook strongly with the poem "Analfabeta," the Spanish word for an illiterate female. Here, the poet uses the reaction of her *abuela* (grandmother) to her sixth-grade granddaughter's failing report card to establish the world in which the poet lives and writes. It is one deliberately set up against non-whites and non-native English-speaking whites in particular, and one where whites' authority is used to divide non-white families against one another.

You would have thought her a dignitary, the day she walked
Into my 6th grade classroom, staccato heels, her good black dress
Ironed crisp as a dollar, all for a date with Mrs. Dempsey,
Who looked at us down the long slope of her nose and began
To tear me down in tea-time tones that forgot to mention

She sometimes slipped and called me 'Spic, how she pounced
When I spoke to my friends in *Espanol*. *Abuela* caught most of the
Words Dempsey lobbed her way, but didn't say a thing, just glared at me
Every second she endured the shame of my shortcomings
Which seemed as personal as the fine stitch of her heirloom DNA....

This is the backdrop before which Moro-McCormick's life, and the lives of all Cuban-Americans, play out. The poet continues to establish and explain the society in which she lives in "Inheritance," which describes her Cuban immigrant father's struggles to earn money and respect in the United States, and in "White Christmas In *El Exilio*, 1979," about the poet's struggle not to appear as the "strange as outer-space,/ new Cuban girl on the block" at a neighborhood Christmas party.

After these poems, Moro-McCormick draws the focus of her poems more closely to herself. In "Conversations Past Midnight," she details an intimate discussion with an older brother after he loses his virginity with a prostitute "bought and paid for by *Papi*," and an unhappy marriage in the chapbook's titular poem, a response to a popular cookware website's insistence that all meals between loves should be romantic.

As with the other books covered in this review, Moro-McCormick's also touches on her struggle (and the struggle many women have) with food; for example, in "Compulsion: A Chronology," she offers a series of nine vignettes revolving around various foods she consumed at various stages in her life, from baby formula to forbidden Burger King Whoppers, wedding cake, and, eventually, the dangerous appetite suppressant phentermine (also known as Fen-Phen).

The pills are small and canary yellow,
the closest thing to magic I've ever tried, so I pledge
allegiance to the doctor who doles them out twenty-one at
a time and come to depend on my golden beauties for pep

and when the weight falls off my frame five pounds a
weigh-in, my hair is the first to revolt, jumping ship in
knotted fistfuls day after day in the shower until one night,
blood leaks out my nose and into my mouth and all I can
think to do is lick away the evidence, tastiest thing I've had
for weeks.

However, the book's most engaging poems are those in which Moro-McCormick describes her affair with another married woman. In my career as a reviewer, I have read much in the way of brutally honest poetry. However, little of it comes quite so close to the bone as Moro-McCormick's—perhaps because it takes quite a lot of courage and candor to write honestly about a taboo subject like adultery (and adultery with a same-sex partner at that). The affair encompasses much of the book's latter half, beginning with the pair's first meeting at a pool hall in "That Night at the Rack 'Em Room" and concluding with an awkward, post-break-up car ride in "Veteran's Day, 2005, Lincoln Road, Miami Beach." Along the way, Moro-McCormick delivers a knockout of a poem, "For My Lover Returning to Her Husband," written after the style of Anne Sexton. It is, I think, one of the most painful and devastating poems I have read in my entire time at *Pedestal*, so good that I regret it is too long to quote in full. Instead, I quote its second page and insist that it alone is worth twice the chapbook's \$12 price.

I give you back.
I give you permission—
For the lava inside him,
Spewing on your thighs,

for the coward in him,
the drinker, the liar,
the teller of secrets
who wanted to watch,

for the pale scar on his nose,
for the prize that is his face,
for his strong man's arms
and seven white shirts,

for the vasectomy,
for the caretaker in you
who considers compromise
when he burrows beneath you,

tugs on the brown
ribbons of your hair
to tie you up, tie you
to him, captive.

He is comfortable,
climb him
like Everest.
He is solid.

As for me, I am makeup.
I wash off.

Moro-McCormick is a master not only of narrative, but of hard-hitting lines and concise, sharp imagery. *Visionware*, I think, should be essential reading not only in every course on Cuban-American literature and lesbian/bisexual literature, but also for everyone interested in one of the finest voices in contemporary poetry. I await her next publication with great anticipation.