

organ has been removed with a dull razor, and without anaesthetic. Behind her, the female “buankisa,” or circumciser, washes the girls’ blood from the area. In this photo, Kadi’s formerly open, easy stance has closed. Her arms wind a piece of dark fabric tightly around her naked frame, and her facial features are newly marked with pain, mistrust, and despair. Eyes narrowed, Kadi’s feet stand slightly apart and unsteady on the hut’s dirt floor. Bloody footprints mark the earth behind her. Blood from a chicken sacrificed before the mutilation spatters the walls.

Like this final shot, earlier photographs of the weeping Kadi and her sisters underscore the girls’ suffering. These photos depict the aftermath of what seems from the prefatory text to be a “sunna” circumcision entailing partial or total excision of the clitoris—the type of female genital mutilation most practiced in central Africa where the book’s events apparently take place. A single drawback to this volume is its lack of specific context. There is only a partial indication of where Kadi lives, making it difficult to ascertain what country she is from or what kind of female genital mutilation typically is performed in her culture. It seems to be primarily a Muslim region, though Rioja notes that Christians and animists in the area also practice the tradition. The country is called “sub-Saharan” and Rwanda is mentioned in Rioja’s introduction, but this information is not given straightforwardly. The omission may be deliberate, as Rioja writes that the Ministry of Health in Kadi’s country has “initiated one of the most significant anti-female circumcision campaigns in any African country.” While powerful, the book would be stronger still with more precise information.

Boundary Bay

Rishma Dunlop

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Reviewed by Cassie Premo Steele

In the best of these poems, hawks and herons, wetlands and berries fade, and couples come into focus— a mother and daughter; a daughter and her potential lover; a husband and wife; a woman and her lover. These are intimate poems of love for our daughters’ delicacy (even as they paint their fingernails blue); of longing for a husband’s presence as the years, like tides, wash him away; of the need for grounding in the lives we have chosen, even as we remember those from whom we have walked away.

In the stunning first poem, "Stories from Boundary Bay," the mother as artist presents herself: "the mother writing poems of girls / the art on white sheets like love." It is this love- of girls, of art- that grounds: "our children's needs / relentless magnets / anchoring us to earth." The book is dedicated to the poet's daughters, and in the first section, entitled "Slippage," the speaker watches carefully over her growing daughters, her dying mother, and her companion nature, and emerges a sensual, embodied but fragile and lonely woman.

In the second section, "The Body of My Garden," the wife / lover / woman takes over. These poems, while not ostensibly about motherhood, invoke the melancholic question of where the marriage goes after children arrive. In a geographic motif, the husband / lover / loved one takes off, like a heron over the bay, leaving the woman behind either metaphorically or literally as the one to care for the children, while she writes (in "Correspondence," "Variations of Blue: Foreign Correspondence," and "Autograph") and sings (in "Invocation," "Song of," and "Prelude") to those who are gone.

This absence becomes a substitute for desire, a need tinged with anger, as in "Hunger": "the terrain of marriage / leaves me starving / mouth full of love." Sometimes such longing turns beautiful, as it does in the best poem in the collection, "Valentine." At other times, emotion in the face of long absence simply sustains us, as in these lines, from "Variations of Blue: Foreign Correspondence":

when you write of this blue intensity of tears
I know that such a response to blue
will survive the passing of years,
the crumbling of bones, our distances and silences

such a response to blue
wraps a lyric shawl around my throat,
close to the pulse of blood
I will always know your presence
as an alphabet; it spells my name.