

gravity loves the body

Monika Lee

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Reviewed by Nancy Gerber

This book of poems by Monika Lee is an example of *l'écriture féminine*, a woman's writing of the body. As announced in the title, the collection explores how experiences of the life cycle—pregnancy, birth, nursing, sexuality and sexual encounters, death—are written on the body. Lee offers readers a portrait of bodies that betray, decay, dance, and rejoice, bodies that reveal the emotional and physical intimacy of the mother-child bond.

One of the themes throughout the collection is the disconnect between body and mind, which we see in the physical trauma of childbirth and its accompanying joy at the infant's arrival: "you will crack me open / and the pain will leave no bruises" (13). Other kinds of disjunctions are explored in the poem "circumventing death" and "a mother's dying." The former juxtaposes the stillness and silence of a grandparent's corpse and the tangle of emotions felt by those who are grieving. To the adult, "truth is / a stale and hideous husk of useless flesh / is worse than nothing"; to the grandchild, grandfather is an angel (45). In the poem "a mother's dying," the rupture of the boundary between birth and death is felt in such lines as "it is akin to her own birth / for the child to behold her mother's dying" and "a mother's dying is the final echo of being born / birth was the first time I lost her / her death will be the last" (46). Lee's identification of the daughter's separation from the mother as the primal loss is evocative and powerful, reminding me of Adrienne Rich's assertion in *Of Woman Born* that

mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other ... a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other. (220)

In her introduction to *White Ink*, published by ARM's Demeter Press in 2007, Rishma Dunlop also notes the symbolic significance of the mother's body to the daughter: for women, writing is a reunion with the maternal body in particular, and with female bodies in general (3).

In her powerful new book, Monika Lee reminds us bodies, like poems, speak a language that is visceral, evocative, sensuous, and real.