



CPR VOLUME 21, ISSUE 3 / REVIEWS

Flatlands by Ruth Williams

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Review by A. N. DeJesus

The relationship between landscape and self-identity are often more deeply intertwined than we can imagine. In *Flatlands*, Williams explores this link between her developing sense of Self and her life in the flat expanse of plains in Nebraska. The poetic landscape of this collection cultivates surprising language and musicality of



verse, allowing for the fundamental truths of Williams’s life in the plains to be illuminated with beautifully wrought images.

In “Physiography,” Williams writes:

Flatlands,
 the pat of a hand
 on your head. A good
 girl,
 a slicing edge. Like a
 scythe
 through grass you learn
 to love
 the sound of cutting hair...



Flatlands
 Ruth Williams
 978-1-62557-989-8
 (2018, Black Lawrence
 Press)
 \$15.95, paper

The complexities of girlhood in rural life are fleshed out in this piece with the unexpected juxtaposition of violence and passivity. The underlying toxicity of learned submission is plainly evident without discounting the complications of familial tradition. The piece ends with the lines,

so being put in your place
 is like a cross on your flat back.

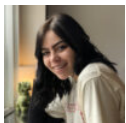
The finality of these closing lines is palpable. Williams refrains from the use of flowery language and instead opts for simplicity. The jarring image of crucifixion communicates how natural submission and complacency become in an environment where it is



expected and enforced as a community unto young girls and women.

Flatlands is rife with revelations of the ramifications this kind of upbringing has on the development of her identity as an individual, and as a woman. Understated and subtle, the poems themselves take root. Whether you live in a bustling city, a sprawling suburb, or a cottage on the cape, this book is an invaluable window onto life in a place where each sunset and sunrise send the earth aflame as far as the eye can see.

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◀ 5



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RUTH WILLIAMS VOLUME 21-3

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