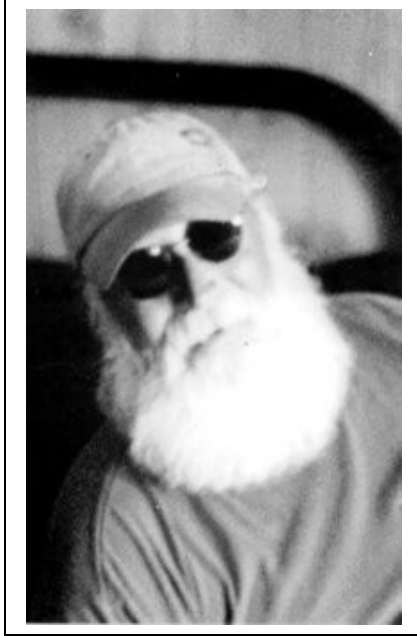


For the Living Dead by Eric Greinke



For The Living Dead, poems by Eric Greinke, Published by Free Books, Lowell, Michigan

Reviewed by Anne Brudevold

This collection of poems is organized thematically and visually. The poems are meditations on The Living Dead – from the metaphysical questions in the first poem, “Lonely Planets,” to the horrific physical details of physical death and its consequences in “The severed head of Orpheus,” to the questioning transcendent yet dubious final “I feel the spirits of the dead...I hear the call of light...through the neutral rocks/ the stale bread that feeds/ the dreams of the anemic world” the reader is led through rooms of death arranged like an art exhibit. The title For the Living Dead evokes robots, a lifeless planet, and the horrors of nonfeeling, inhumane humans. It is a spare picture, described unemotionally but with a subtext of nostalgia for a time when humans were connected to their natural place in their environment. The poem suggests that inattention to the

health of planet Earth is intimately connected to the health of its human inhabitants, and as such, *For the Living Dead* is an elegy to a dead planet. However, Greinke reminds us in the first poem, "Exploding supernovae/Spread particles/Across the galaxy. /We still live/ in that ocean, we/ Carry it around/ in our cells." The first poem ends "Our eyes are the water/ In the ocean of stars./ We can taste it our tears."

"In Space" reminds us that "the faster you go/ the more energy it takes." In the nostalgia for a time of past imagination and boyhood that is one of the book's theme, the poet asks, "'But what about the spaceships?'/You ask, remembering a time.'"

In the world of Greinke's book, natural phenomena are strange and upside down. "What have you done/ to my moon, mother?/ Why does it seem/ To snow forever?"/ ("Initial Contact")

"When the naiveté of the poet begins to seem unreal and dreamlike. "With all the universe/ behind me/ and only the blue sphere / of planet earth/ Floating before me/ I'd never worry/ That we might drift apart? (Perspective), Greinke balances such scenes of wistfulness with humor. "When the soaked house/ dries in the sun,' clouds of steam rise up,/ & naive strangers alert the firehouse."

The power of innocence attempts to balance the cynicism of this book – eloquently stated in "Garment," where the poet acquires the Platonic power to see reality. "My coat of fool's gold/ Wiser than the stars/Like the dark heart/ Hidden in a bright cave/ Hidden in infinity/ So far out in the open/ That little fish/Swim through its fabric."

Greinke's work is a testimony to the power of close observation of nature as a way of redemption becoming one of the Living Dead. However, he is not optimistic. He is in fact, shockingly pessimistic. "Political agendas/ Stink up the

galaxy/ Stalked in Stockings/ Born to run away/ Lost civilizations/In the tired sky/ I blink/ drink water/ Fish disappear?"

Greinke's language is plain, eloquent, original, and occasionally gorgeous as in "Crop Damage" where "desperate fields wept/Red with wounded tomatoes."

In the title poem, the poet grovels in an awful vision of the Living Dead. He sees zombies everywhere; having been one and having experienced an awakening, he is sensitive to the terror of living like a zombie, "mesmerized by fireworks/ They like to run amok/ When they aren't milling aimlessly/... Zombies have no sex lives/ They share the despair of the wolfman/ Drunk on power under full moon/ soaked in gasoline waiting for a light/ Enflamed by love & hate/ Counting down to the final insult.... They are the human furniture/They are the living dishrags...fitted with artificial hearts." The truly terrifying picture of the Living Dead would overwhelm the reader with despair, were it not for the fact that the poet has flashes of inspiring language. Near the end, we have a kind of prayer. "I hear the spirits of the dead/They explode like seedpods/A thousand downy spheres/Doors that won't stay closed/Locks meant to be broken/ Dandelions born in the wind."

Highly Recommended.
- Anne Brudevold