

She-Giant in the Land of Here-We-Go-Again
by Kristina Andersson Bicher
MadHat Press, 2020
67 pages

Review by Lo Galluccio

EVERY SO OFTEN one comes across a stunning new poetry collection, a book that leaves you a little dizzy, one that beckons to be re-read, so rich and fascinating its verse. Such is the case with

Kristina Andersson Bicher's debut book, *She-Giant in the Land of Here-We-Go-Again*. Even the title delights, a kind of clue to the book's grounding in both mythic and modern worlds. This work swells and delights like the hooks of a good pop song, but its textures and tones are more like the fantasia of a dark classical symphony. Kristina takes us through the perilous chambers of her "sloppy heart" and through the channels of an episodic tale of loss, madness and new-found identity.

There are bereavements and confessions and rants as well as poems that run a few scant lines of powerful epiphany or cryptic message. One of the masterful joys of this collection is the range of form and content – one cannot stay attached to any one style of poem – Bicher leads us along a forest of many kinds of trees, some bearing ripe fruit, some stripped bare to winter's austere and frigid touch.

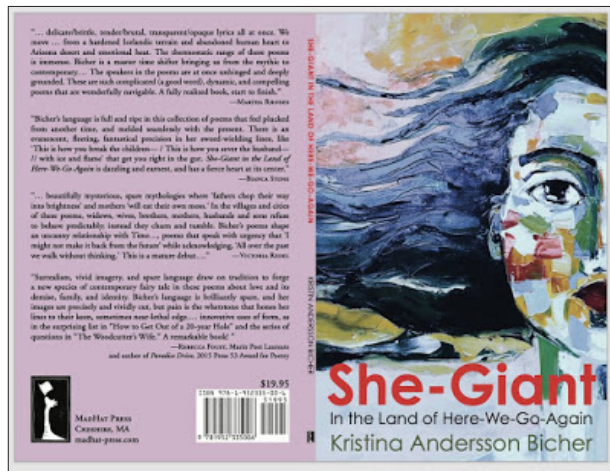
The poet is widow, divorcee, lover, sister, prophet, folksinger, mother, daughter and goddess. From the first poem, "The Widow Sings a Love Song," she writes:

*praise the nape of you where/dark bee of my mouth goes troubling/the plum swale
let me sink through some small bore...*

This bee somehow alerts me to Sylvia Plath's work but is not a direct allusion. One feels sure the poet has read Plath and Sexton and many other poets whose techniques she adopts and wields, always in the service of creating something original and new.

*In "Unborn" she sizzles with rhyme:
I am mar scar flat star*

*eat and heal
pig's squeal*



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*I verve and flash
verse when I slash...*

There are several poems with Icelandic titles, Bicher's ancestry is Swedish and she peppers the book with references to places and myths in Scandinavia. In the poem Kirkjubaejarklaustur, she writes:

*This is how you break the children—
This is how you sever the husband*

with ice and flame.

This story of wrecking, breaking, abandoning is one of the threads that run through this book like a fever chart. In a poem with the contemporary backdrop of NYC, Bicher overlays Biblical references. Her endings are generally powerful and surprising:

In "Ode to Restraint in a West Village Bar" subtitled ("Or other gods I have invoked" she ends with:

*Slither me up the white calf/of Atlas to burn that bright scapula/blade blue. I
would rip the sky/to fill my mouth---*

In the short poem "Eve Dreams" she blasts:

*her son is a child
in the desert
has no skin
is lonely
and no longer hers*

This is a poem of consequence, the dreaded consequence of leaving children behind, of striking out on one's own, where dreams turn into emblems of brutality. Kindled in the crucible of elements, these poems are often primal awakenings and the writer is an icon of womanhood. She is not only herself, she is Eve, the woman who supposedly caused mankind's fall from grace.

In a poem that takes on the largess of mythology, it's source an Icelandic Rune poem, Bicher inscribes a series of bold statements:

*Sadness is the toil of the steed.
Fear is the leavings of the wolf.
Comfort is a god with one hand.
Divorce is the pickaxe of the doomed.*

And yet, despite the nightmare of divorce, Bicher is far from doomed. She writes a love poem to a present-day lover, in "One Year In,"

*He continues to talk in circles
I do nothing to improve my life
I still come to him with the hunger of a junkie
Our night-dreams are kaleidoscopic and encyclopedic
It has become impossible to sleep without his hand on my belly.*

The hard edges of desire nevertheless ends with this simple senti-

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ment:

*I buy him heatproof spatulas; he buys me handmade paper.
He's gained weight since we met. I think this means he's happy.*

This is a book that oscillates and travels, from Arizona to Bellevue (where her brother Krister lies in a hospital bed) from NYC to a countryside where we would expect to find Hansel and Gretel's witch. The book's shifts and swells are deftly achieved with brilliant syntax and phrasing. There are three poems titled, "Prophecy" and two labeled "Lament" these numbered and each one a tale of beauty and woe. The poet also introduces Antietam (famous battleground of the Civil War in Maryland) in a poem called "Missing" about she and her ex-husband driving to the mountains to leave her brother, Krister, behind. Later in the book the poet writes two shorter pieces, "Antietam I" and "Antietam II" which deconstruct the situation, in the first piece, referring to Krister as a "ghost" and in two stanzas of disjointed verse embodying the traumatic pain of leaving him behind.

*We left him in amid red hills
Swings empty and sitting on it
Krister is him in the doctors' rightness
So a hollow swing
Krister is.*

Bicher uses compression and space well. In "The Famine that Follows" she writes:

*We die not
from fire
But its quenching---*

...
*We will fall
upon each other
with forks
and fingers*

we will eat our very names

Bicher rarely lets the intensity flag in this collection. These poems are brazen and lustrous, well-constructed and brave. She is constantly aware of absence, neglect, passion and the aftermath of human connection. In "Then" she writes:

*When you are gone, for good
From me, irrevocably gone,
Irretrievable*

...
*Will you be sun-dust risen
From nowhere, insubstantial
Dissolving in shade
That cannot enter me*

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*Or will I burnish our story into myth
Harden you to marble
Will I put you on a horse?*

I urge you to order a copy of this book. It upends, terrifies and delights. There is a plethora of excellent poems – too many to reference. Kristina has through her imagination and passion transformed her life into an object of reckoning and pathos. A truly beautiful work.