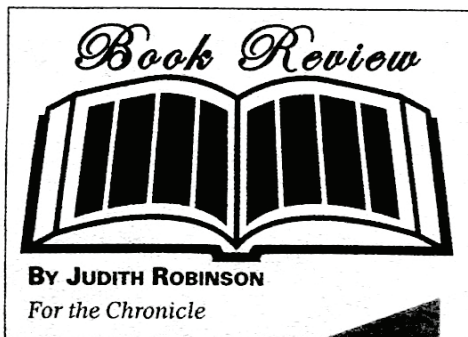


BOOKS

'The Girl is Smiling' displays intimacy in free verse



Today's poets work less and less in fixed form, such as the sonnet or the villanelle; and free verse, which requires the writer to create his or her own patterning, often seems to result in more intimate, more immediate access to the voice of the poet.

And in "The Girl Is Smiling," the poetic voice of Cheryl Moskowitz resonates with intimacy; it is tender, as well as vivid.

Good free verse requires images and allusions that the poet shapes into something worth remembering. Consider these searing lines from "Adrift":

*They brought her the dead drowned
body of her husband.*

*That's not him, she cried...
Adrift we cannot determine what is
ours;*

*unpick the tears and threads
or pull away, untied.*

*Not his face anymore
Not the arms and hands that carried
her.*

*All that washes in now
Comes in smooth
As a pebbled stone.*

Moskowitz's voice can also be subtle and quite particular. In a poem consisting of three long sentences, she describes the space between a mother and a daughter thusly:

*It's like the blind swoop and swerve of
bats,*

*the way they come too close, always or
nearly*

*in your hair... Too close, but not quite
far enough*

*to want to keep in touch...like...a tree
fern...fronds extend*

*like fingers...a dark canopy shadow-
ing everything.*

In "Lifted," Moskowitz exercises a penchant for musicality. The poem is so rhythmic it might be a chant, or a dance.

*Red scarecrow girl/a slip of a thing
this hollow dried out twig of a thing...*

*shivering skin-and-bone stick of a
thing
rattling about in a size ten coat...*

*This man/this guard/this brick of a
thing...*

*The room where they took her/a pit of
a thing...*

*This practically invisible/wholly
derisible
Breakable/shakable/bit of a thing.*

"The Girl Is Smiling" takes as subject matter an introspective, deep feeling woman's life concerns: human relationships, parenting, childhood, aging, and of course, love.

Her voice is uniquely clear, yet nuanced, to this reader more universal than Jewish, more worldly than American, although the sensibility here

reflects a wisdom we might proudly imagine we share.

(Judith Robinson writes the "Good Poems" poetry blog for the Chronicle at thejewishchronicle.net.)

