

Upstairs in the Garden: A Review

Moir

To discover a writer who arouses a myriad of passions when the cold unforgiving north wind blows through all the cracks and gaps in my old farm house is akin to any sensual delight imaginable. Finding Robin Morgan's collection, *Upstairs in the Garden*, (W.W. Norton, 1990) amongst a pile of Christmas gifts from my love was just that warming treat for me.

The collection of poems is compiled from several of Morgan's previously published works, along with many new poems. The book spans her writing from 1968 till 1988, taking us through the life changes reflected in Morgan's very personal writing style.

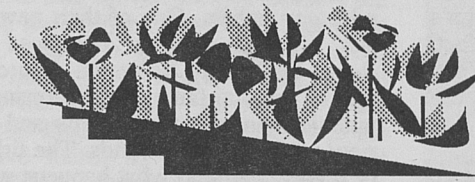
With my partner looking over my shoulder and after a quick look at the index, I turned to page 28, *Lesbian Poem*. Here in italics the poet writes, "dedicated to those who turned immediately from the contents page to this poem." After our shared laughter we both fell into what read as a wondrous journey into the heart and mind of an inspiring woman. Morgan captures moments for us and pulls the threads of familiar closer. Simple, clear language are in her words. In *Lesbian Poem* we hear her honest speech;

*"I love women as a People, yes.
And my breath, work, like (and probably
my death) are bound to women
out of that love."*

Morgan carries through with cutting reality:

*"Yet I have also lain in beds
with some women, yes,
for a variety of reasons-
not the least of which,
surprisingly/obviously,
was male respect."*

*But if there is a next time, by god,
it will not be for that,*



*nor will we lie on a plank
in someone's correct political platform,
nor will it be done for abstract female approval
or respect.*

*It will be because our minds
challenge and delight each other,
and for other qualities I cannot know yet
because they will be hers,
concrete, specific, individual,
like her name."*

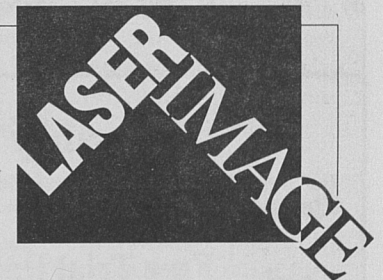
Another of Morgan's poems, *Two Women*, is six pages long, not unusual among her epic poems. It is another of her intensely personal poems that seemed to speak directly to us.

*"Never the rosebud nor the rain, my dear,
were you to me.
Never the sunset nor the dawn
was I to you.
Indulgences of indolent linguistics
have no place between two women of a tem-
perament more prone
to cactus thorns and blizzards,
two women living in an age
of instant fissioned noon before
an everlasting night."*

This poem, like many in this collection, is a story where we ride on the sounds and passions of the poet's words. Morgan's poetry explores themes of motherhood, her years of relationships, political struggles, her feelings about women, her revealing feelings about

all of it. The injustices we as women experience is a theme that laces many of her longer pieces together. Morgan as a writer has a wonderful knack of starting us in a very small private place, a familiar place, and then transporting us to a much broader picture encompassing the "all" yet somehow holding us to the personal. Poems such as *City of God*, *The Network of the Imaginary Mother*, *Battery*, and many others are all such stories, little journeys in themselves.

The fine writing and complex thoughts that make up these poems leave me incapable of paraphrasing, so I will leave you with this taste and the burning desire to build yet another fire and curl up with this fascinating woman poet. ▼



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