

Visual And Performing Arts

18-2-0146

Street, Richard Steven. *Everyone Had Cameras: Photography and Farmworkers in California, 1850–2000*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. 736 pp. ISBN 978-0-8166-4967-9, \$34.95 (pb).

A well-researched and comprehensive book, this is the story of the past 150 years of photographers and the photographs they have taken of the California farmworker. No one is better suited for writing this book than Street, the founder, owner, and manager of Streetshots agricultural photography, author of several books on photography and the history of the California farmworker, and one who has been photographing farmworkers since 1975. But Street actually starts his book before photography in 1767, when the missionaries, explorers, and artists painted the first farmworkers. Street then proceeds through time, covering photographers and the farmworker during the 1850s Gold Rush, the 1930s with Dorothea Lange and Otto Hagel during the Great Depression, activism and Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers of the 1960s, through the 1980s to the new millennium with undocumented farmworkers, their living conditions, and the effects of pesticides on farmworkers, their children, and the environment.

Street writes, and we come to understand, that “so deeply imbedded in the farmworker story are photographers that it cannot be told, studied or understood without paying attention to their still-evolving vision” (11). Over 100 black-and-white photographs are included, as well as notes and an index. Highly recommended.

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Biography/Autobiography

18-2-0147

Al-Baz, Rania. *Disfigured: A Saudi Woman's Story of Triumph Over Violence*. Northampton, Mass.: Interlink, 2009. 168 pp. Trans. from Arabic by Catherine Spencer. ISBN 978-2-56656-735-0, \$15.00 (pb).

Disfigured reminded me of the biographical film *Erin Brockovich*. In both memoirs, the women endure great struggles and push through tough obstacles to arrive at and live in their truths. They do so by focusing on their strengths rather than pointing fingers, dwelling in resentment, or pursuing revenge.

Rania Al-Baz was a beautiful young Saudi TV news anchor—the first woman to have such a job—when her abusive husband beat her into a coma and left her for dead. She later underwent

son's prose poems speak in the voice of a “murderer and a torturer, a baby and a jerk that would like to/kill insects, fart, and take naps forever.” A “tincture” of humor softens otherwise merciless self-examination. In a dream poem, the “jerk” is the adult caring for a talking baby at the beach. When the baby gets sick, he tries to wash it in the water. When the tide rises too quickly, he can't get to safety. Why is he so inadequate? Perhaps because he failed to be straight: “What would have happened to his small, dreaming/ brown frame of a body if it had not pudged out into the/ impossible desire to be white, small and a girl like Tracy/ Austin?” Or perhaps it's that he fears how much “his mother's love made her willing to absorb what his father/ could not control”? He has a White lover; is that like wearing the “Wilke-Rodriguez black wax cloth peacoat” that his family could never have afforded? Or is his secret rage against his lover's “milk-fed” skin really a life raft against all the ways you can drown when you love unconditionally?

This book is about family, sex (graphically portrayed!), race, and, most importantly, self-hood, asking if “his being whole has to do with his being/ able to exist at the end of pleasure, free, his whole body/ reeling at the tip of his lips.”

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Criticism

18-2-0145

Currey, James. *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature*. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2008. 320 pp. Illus. with photos by George Hallett. ISBN 978-0-8214-1842-0, \$55.00 (c); 978-0-8214-1843-7, \$26.95 (pb).

June 2008 denotes the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Chinua Achebe's seminal work, *Things Fall Apart*. The novel was published by the London imprint, Heinemann Educational Books. This effort laid the foundation, and provided the impetus, for the creation of the African Writers Series, which began in 1962. This series produced over 300 literary works in less than 20 years. *Africa Writes Back* details the struggles and triumphs associated with this publishing endeavor.

The author of this work served as the editorial director at Heinemann from 1967 until 1984. This text provides a narrative detailing the creative conflicts and political obstacles that affected the publisher and numerous writers, such as James Ngugi, Dambudzo Marechera, Dennis Brutus, and Bessie Head. Correspondence from writers and novelists from all regions of Africa are included.

Africa Strikes Back is supplemented by an essay that speculates about the future of the imprint and a list of published works of the African Writers Series from 1962 until 2003. Recommended only for graduate students and scholars of African literature.

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