

The Lame God: Review by Florida Book Review

[The original article by Marci Calabretta can be found here: <http://www.floridabookreview.net/poetry.html>]

Because the adage is true that there are too many books and so little time, I've learned to devour poetry quickly. When I picked up M. B. McLatchey's debut collection of poetry, *The Lame God*, I expected to breeze through it as easily as any other book.

But *The Lame God* is not like any other book. In fact, it is exactly the sort of book you can only read by pondering slowly. It is also a book that calls readers to action, even before the first poem begins. In the preface, McLatchey writes that roughly 2,000 children "are reported missing daily to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children." An opening epigraph next reads, "Acting quickly is critical. Seventy-four percent of abducted children who are ultimately murdered are dead within three hours of the abduction."

In the first section, each poem resonates with the frustration of waiting helplessly for a child to return. The narrator in "1-800-THE-LOST" says, "I want her to discuss you in the present tense. // I want the gods to stop pretending love calls the departed home." Each subsequent section delves deeper into the anguish of loss. First, McLatchey shows the frustration which evolves into real and righteous anger, demanding that the guilty "choke up my child like the Olympians— / a girl, unbruised by her journey down their // throats." Then comes the lashing-out and self-blame. "Apology" is a list poem of regrets that will break your heart:

For—trusting your safe return--
not missing you.
For trusting the gods.
For my second-rate
circumspection;
for trusting the odds.
[...]
For teaching you not to shout.
For us still uncovering
your terror—layer by layer.
For this sputtering sound of real prayer.

Finally, comes the acceptance—not of absence, or of seeking justice, or even of grief itself. No, these poems finally settle into the acceptance of waiting for news of any kind—good or bad—because either way, these parents will be there when their children come home. "Do not worry, daughter. We are not leaving our watch / or showing our cards—just changing the guard."

McLatchey is the poet standing at the gate, holding a torch to keep hope aflame even as the darkness descends. A graduate of Harvard University, Brown University, and Goddard College, McLatchey currently teaches writing and humanities at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona, Florida. Well-versed in Classical mythology, she knows how to grit her teeth and tell the traumatic story in a way that will make people listen. She is the rare poet who looks fearlessly and closely at the terrible actions of which humans are capable, and who tenderly yet artfully tells the true stories of Adam Walsh, Amber Hagerman, Levi Frady, Maile Gilbert, Morgan Chauntel Nick, and Molly Bish, whose mother "encouraged [McLatchey] to 'keep talking about this; keep writing.'"

When Edward Field chose *The Lame God* for the 2013 May Swenson Poetry Award, he wrote, "it takes courage to read this book...In exploring such a grief through the language of poetry, McLatchey *makes things happen*—she gives a voice to those too grief-stricken to speak, and she refuses to allow us to suffer in silence."

This book is not for the faint-hearted, or for the "breezy reader." This book is for those 2,000 children daily reported missing, for their families, and for those moments when poetry alone can break through the grief. "But it is especially for the child who has not yet pried open a bolted door, borrowed a neighbor's phone, and announced to a 911 operator, 'I've been kidnapped and I've been missing...and I'm here.'"

Marci Calabretta grew up in Ithaca, NY and is currently earning an MFA at FIU. Her work has appeared in Rainy Day, The Albion Review, and The MacGuffin. She is the co-founder and managing editor for Print Oriented Bastards and a Florida Book Review Contributing Editor.