EMMA
BOLDEN
CONTENTS

Because of the House We Have Built for Our Language  4
Author Notes  5
Because of the House We Have Built for Our Language

Both moss and nightfall creep and crawl, neither respectfully nor respectively. Over time, paper leaves its spine, which lacks the durability of bone. Bone is strung to bone with spinal cord,

which is not a sound. Tongue is both a sound and the muscle that makes it. Skin is both the covering and the act of uncovering. The heart is an organ that seventy-two times per minute pumps blood

into meaning, which is not blue but red. The heart is an organ with four chambers, which are not rooms. Rooms are places we build for ourselves to live. There will never be enough of them.
Author Notes

Emma Bolden is the author of Maleficae (GenPop Books, 2013) and medi(t)ations, forthcoming from Noctuary Press. She’s also the author of four chapbooks of poetry: How to Recognize a Lady (part of Edge by Edge, Toadlily Press); The Mariner’s Wife, (Finishing Line Press); The Sad Epistles (Dancing Girl Press); and This Is Our Hollywood (in The Chapbook). Her nonfiction chapbook, Geography V, is forthcoming from Winged City Press. Bolden’s work has appeared in such journals as The Rumpus, Harpur Palate, Prairie Schooner, Conduit, the Indiana Review, the Greensboro Review, Redivider, Verse, Feminist Studies, The Journal, Guernica, and Copper Nickel.

About the Work

I started playing this game with language when I was very young: I look at a word and re-arrange the letters, seeing what other words I can make (and, at times, what nonsensical but exciting quasi-words I can make). When I was four, I told my mother about my most exciting discovery yet: that “dog” spelled backwards is “god.” This shocked my (very Roman Catholic) mother, who told me that I should probably not tell my kindergarten teacher (also very Roman Catholic, and at a very Roman Catholic school) what I’d discovered. Though I didn’t realize it yet, in that moment, I began to see that language has great power, and that part of this power comes from its sheer malleability, its ability to shift almost capriciously from one meaning to another—often completely different—meaning.

I was thinking about the nearly alchemical properties of language—and how I felt as though my own language had lost all of its magic—when I jotted down notes for “Because of the House We Have Built for Our Language.” I’d been participating in the Grind, a project founded by Ross White in which writers write a poem a day and send it to their group, for several months, and I was definitely feeling “ground” down (forgive the pun—another doubling of meaning!). At the same time, I was dealing with chronic illnesses and felt, as many people with chronic illnesses do, as if I both couldn’t and shouldn’t talk to the people around me about it. Poetry became, for me, the one place where I could speak freely.

However, I soon became as sick of writing poems about sickness as I was of dealing with sickness itself. I was tired of writing about the body, and I was especially tired of the language I’d been using to talk about the body. I always seemed to build my poems about the body around the metaphor of a house, a structure in which we live our lives. When I wanted to explore the destructibility of that structure, I found myself writing about the separate parts from which the body as a whole is built, especially skin and bone. I was sick of it. I’d written so many poems about the feeling of being trapped inside of the body that I felt trapped inside of my writing about the body as well. Raymond Queneau once described the OuLiPo as “rats who build the labyrinth from which they will try to escape,” and I felt very much like a rat, trapped, in a strangely Escher-esque way, by the labyrinth of my own language.

Much like Queneau and his fellow OuLiPians, I found my way out of the labyrinth by playing games with language. Ironically, I first began to find my way out of this trap in the waiting room of my doctor’s office, a place where one can’t help but think of the body, and a place that
literally feels like a trap. Perhaps this collision of metaphor and matter primed me to notice the multiplicities of meaning in language. I sat next to two other patients, who were in the middle of a talk about the damp weather and Spanish moss so ubiquitous in Savannah.

“It just sneaked into all of my trees,” one patient said.

“It’ll do that to you,” the other patient replied. “That moss just creeps over everything it sees.”

Perhaps it’s because we’d been waiting for a very long time, or because I felt loopy after writing a poem every day for so many months, that I was captivated by her verb use. I imagined, for a moment, the moss as a burglar, creeping around at nightfall. I then thought about that word—“nightfall”—itself, how it itself is a metaphor for darkness in descent, and how night is also said to creep. I started thinking about more words with multiplicities of meaning—how a spine can run through the center of a body or the center of a book, how “skin” describe the tissue that covers a body and the process of removing that tissue from a body. I was playing a version of the game I’d played as a child, and it gave me the very same sense of joy and pleasure in the mysteries of language. I was able to reconnect with language and once again see the labyrinth as a game, as a maze that offered new directions and realizations at every turn.

Emma Bolden on the Web

emmabolden.com/

therumpus.net/2014/03/about-the-human-hymen-disambiguation/

blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2014/02/book-preview-emma-boldens-meditations.html

issuu.com/chapbook/docs/the_chapbook_volume_2__dec._3_2013/5

http://www.genpopbooks.com/emma-bolden/maleficae/