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Forest Primeval: Poems



Synopsis

Winner, 2016 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in the Poetry category Finalist, 2015 Balcones Poetry Prize Shortlist finalist, 2015 PEN Open Book Award for an exceptional book by an author of color "Another Anti-Pastoral," the opening poem of *Forest Primeval*, confesses that sometimes "words fail." With a "bleat in [her] throat," the poet identifies with the voiceless and wild things in the composed, imposed peace of the Romantic poets with whom she is in dialogue. Vievee Francis's poems engage many of the same concerns as her poetic predecessors - faith in a secular age, the city and nature, aging, and beauty. Words certainly do not fail as Francis sets off into the wild world promised in the title. The wild here is not chaotic but rather free and finely attuned to its surroundings. The listener who joins her will emerge sensitized and changed by the enduring power of her work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In *Forest Primeval*, Vievee Francis provokes what feels like an intimate conversation with the reader or as a commentary on the book jacket puts it "a sacred conversation with the reader, wrestling with the distressing angel for all of us and demanding a blessing." There's such honesty in these poems, a willingness to be direct and risky around matters of the heart, including revenge or resentment: "When you left, I went to your swan's coop, / snapped every slender neck / in the lot." The speaker seems always in quest of truth driven by a curiosity about what drives her and what is actually going on, and a willingness to challenge her own

assumptions. The lyricism of so many lines stand out (like a sorrow of banjoes), along with the evocative use of fairy tales and myth to address questions of male-female relationships, beauty, and modern living. The internal Dantesque explorations remind me of Frank Gaspar's poetry; the precise clarity of thought and expression coming from deep wounding, of Louise Glück's; and the artful, provocative use of essential questions, of Mary Oliver: "Those with love will have it. Those without will go without. Did you think it would be otherwise?" and, "What kind of girl are you? The kind who wants to live, I said, and I did want to until I didn't anymore. But I wanted the leaving to be on my terms, so I hit my father back." and, "From the window I considered the fall, but I was so pleased to be alive, to realize I now had you, if only briefly, all to myself. Dear blade, so what the truncated future? It is the licks I know are coming that will buckle and betray me." and, "Wolf is just one way to there. To that pain that rocks your bones. Rocking away[.] It's an amazing book, one I'll read again (and again), to savor and to study how the poet does what she does.

Vievee Francis is one of the most exciting poets I've discovered within the last year. Beautiful, haunting and not afraid of the ugly making her words cut twice as deep. Most poets will spend years trying to replicate a work such as *Forest Primeval* and never come close to its incandescent, transcendent nature. The rhythm is both as blunt as a sharp point of a cliff and at other times it stops dead in its track to call attention to a small and intricate detail otherwise ignored. It is the perfect observation of the intense joys and sadness or loneliness of an artistic dreamer's life and of the life of a woman in general. I am proud to call Vievee Francis a fellow woman and feminist. This book is so well worth the purchase. An absolute hidden gem. I promise you will not be disappointed.

FOREST PRIMEVAL is a restless collection of poems in which landscapes (urban, rural, and mythic) collide and collude with the body (that ship full of inherent history). These are poems that both speak to, and subvert the tenets of, Romanticism. The result? Poems in which beauty is found in what is widely worshipped and, especially, in what is feared.

A credit to poetry and to Dartmouth. Beautiful work. Thank you.

Francis is a delightful, challenging poet. This book weaves complex concepts into a rural landscape. I split my time between the mountains of upstate NY and the city and somehow this book shares

affinities with both landscapes. Well worth the read!

This woman is an extraordinary poet and uses her medium, her art, her history to wake us up in ways we may not want to be--but must be!

This is a fantastic piece of work from Vievee Francis!. In *Forest Primeval*, she covers difficult emotional terrain regarding race, gender, image, and the author's personal biography that extends from the rural farm life of Texas to the cold concrete of Chicago and on to the woods of North Carolina. The poet's visceral use of image and stunning insight will make you wince as you turn the page to the next poem, and the next, and the next...

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