



The Memory of Gills

Poetry
by
Catherine Carter

poems

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memory
of gills

CATHERINE CARTER

Praise for *Memory of Gills*

"Carter's poems are utterly unique – wry and quiet and carrying a velvet sledgehammer. Her pitch, her tone, her sly humor is perfectly tuned. This is not just a brilliant first book, it is a brilliant book, period."

– Thomas Lux

"The Memory of Gills is altogether an astonishing, seductive, and finally irresistible book of poems. Carter is a skillful, imaginative, and witty visionary. Here is a poet who hears the voices of the sensate world calling, pleading, cajoling . . . and her poems say what she knows with zest and inventiveness that no reader will soon forget."

– Kathryn Stripling Byer

"Carter's poems are about a sharply observed and often very passionately felt human present that is never seen or experienced apart from the past that preceded it, that haunts it, that gives it its resonance and life."

– R. H. W. Dillard

A HISTORY OF THE LOST COLONY

In the alluvial plain beneath the refrigerator we did well; food was abundant, the soft rains dripped. But we needed *Lebensraum*: our cup ran over, our downy children crowded together. So we sent the colony: filamentous explorers, our dearest spores, a sister city under the cliff of the outer grille. The light there was muted; the ooze was regular, nourishing, fragrant with decay. At first, good reports: hyphae expanded the borders of a town round as a drop of rain, mycotoxins ready to repel invaders. The seers saw only prosperity; the auspices taken from the shaking of the earth were good. How could we know? Who could foresee the blasting of those soft heads, those feathery arms? who could imagine that ocean falling, that splash of acid from the sky? A yard away we heard the screaming. The world stank of bleach, reeked of chemical burns. Our brethren writhed inside out, shriveled in agony. *Colony, colony!* We clutched each other in dactylic grief, our poisoned children gone in a swipe of cloth. We do not know why it happened. What thread of God we angered, why the signs lied, what wrong we did. Now when we think of our new colony, on a tender island of potato fallen between the wall and the toaster, we are afraid. No one is safe. The world is a desperate place.