Book review

REVENANCE BY CYNTHIA HOGUE
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Cynthia Hogue’s, Revenance, is a pleasurably haunting collection of history and the human condition of selective memory. The term “revenance,” which comes from the French meaning a visible ghost, clearly shapes Hogue’s collection of the battling of science and the unexplainable, or life and the afterlife.

Hogue’s collection is separated into five sections, each possessing many different forms and ways of using white space on the page. Hogue’s evocative asides give the poems multiple voices, along with the emphasis of ideas from the speakers.

The first section evokes the execution and digestion of sound through natural imagery. In the poem “In New Hampshire Woods,” for example, the sounds and images represent the “rising flitter of syllable,” with its ongoing-ness and connecting of stanzas, as if the poem is “speaking in tones / that differ as chords.” The section also captures the essence of being a writer.

In “The Women Who Talked With Trees,” the speaker has to hide her novels “in her desk,” representing the burden and responsibility of being a writer or using “tree-speech” while becoming connected with nature.

Section two starts with an interview with Olga Sedakova, a Russian poet. The absence of recordings left Hogue to rely on a backup recorder, which “mangled the speech” of their interview (“Interview with a Samizdat Poet”). The loosely recorded conversation, put into poetic form, represents the woman’s collection of memory and language. Although the conversation is in fragments, the spirit and undertone of language feels “as if you were inside a fairy tale.”

Just as in the first two sections, the third section possesses even more of the evocative asides, which end each quatrain. Working in various ways, they contribute to the flow and pacing of the poem, as well as representing “art’s abstraction” by revealing the speaker’s voice through something as simple as a line break (“On Securities and Exchange”). There are also poems that use white space as a way to emphasize time and space. “In the Time-Space Studio of Morgan O,” for instance, spreads each stanza from left to right across the page, using hyphens and colons to guide the reader to the next stanza.

That third section of the collection is the most abstract, whereas section four is the most narrative. Here, the poems combine modern science with natural phenomenon in order to depict human emotion and memory. The poem “On Principals” uses the irony of human principals, such as “believ[ing] killing could make us / just” so that principles are not definite, especially in the human mind.

The reader transitions into the human mind as he or she moves into section five. This section is composed of block prose and the most interaction between human beings. The presentation of word combinations such as “her ears, cane, brain” give a mystical energy while presenting the connection between humans and ghosts, or the revenants that echo the book’s title (“Care Giving: an Elegy”).

Cynthia Hogue’s collection ends with the surrendering voice of the speaker, which achieves “that clarity,” or the clarity of letting go of principle and wonder and leaving memory up to language (“Clearly in Fall”).