

Review of Nuala M. Archer's *Inch Aeons*

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Nuala M. Archer
Inch Aeons

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"Fleeing back into being" is the leitmotif heard throughout Nuala M. Archer's *Inch Aeons*. Images of birth and rebirth, of entering into a place-in-time at just the precise moment, are woven into this work. Using forms of Haiku, Archer balances themes of time, distance, and consciousness with those of unity and fragmentation, whether in solar systems, or in the human psyche. The mind mimics the planet, the planet mimics the mind. In 'In That Grainy Lapse,' the internal is a reflection of the external and the external, then, is reflected back inward: "In that grainy Lapse/The Catastrophe-the slow/No-End of Cooling" (p. 7).

With a style that harkens back to Emily Dickinson's use of punctuation and capitalization, Archer's exclamation points and dashes ("I cannot-Not—Weep!—" p.61) make her text feel hesitant and plodding at times. Yet this convention makes us stop and think about the word, sometimes even feeling like we're caught in a whirlwind, stopped by the force around us, and then catapulted out again. We feel at times ambushed by the fitfulness of the language.

Archer's unique use of the Haiku form sometimes parallels second language acquisition; there is the re-conjugation of verbs ("Be-Been-Being", "May-Might-Must-Swerve-Merge" p. 60) and a sense of infinite possibilities within the language. There is the purity of the untouched- the learner experiencing through the word. The content here is akin to a first grader's nursery rhymes, the belief in the unexpected. The poetry reflects imagery of the rhythm of birth and rebirth. ("From your abyss backpack—/Placenta unscrolls" p. 69) It is like typing practice sentences, juvenile alliteration inside a commentary on reality, inside the formalism-the formulaic Haiku; sometimes it is also like a counting book for children- ("Three Chiming Goats, Three Red Bells,/ Four Redeemed Throats" p. 33). Archer even uses childlike and cartoonish illustrations from the artist Tamzo to further emphasize these themes. Yet the world always seeps in- ("Let, hardly hatted, hangs out/ In homeless dumpsters" p.23).

Archer frequently calls our attention to the circular nature of the self's development: "folding back in on herself...the circuitous non-consecutive circuits lead beyond endings" (p.22). In the course of circular beginning-to-end-and-back-again, Archer continuously inserts references and experiences from everyday life, which also mirror the repeating pattern of action/reaction such as in 'Well Met': "A-Construction-Site/ Turning a Corner/ Eyesore on Euclid —/ Nineteen Stories and Seven/ Soliloquies High — " (p.23).

In this real-world manner, structure of the poem itself figures into the work, as a way of defining of the poet's own experience: "Through Negative Space- /The Walls are Unimportant!)-/Defined first by Form- (p.22).

Archer points out that there is a deliberateness to our existence, rather than total randomness. There is a certainty in the uncertainty. There is a precision to what happens, and just as the space shuttle must reenter the earth's atmosphere at one particularly ideal moment, so is there an exact moment of reentry that she, the poet, has been fled back into being. There is a gratitude and a celebration of that being. There is the beauty and simplicity in the language. In the structural final section of the book; *Rendezvous*, in 'Am I Duped-or is' (p.94), her found self re-orbits into the atmosphere with the precision and grace of the Found: "Am I duped—/Or is/ That your Voice—really—Calling/ Me to Rendezvous".