Love Medicine and one Song: SAKİHTOWIN-MASKHİKIY EKWA PEYAK-NIKAMOWIN
by Gregory Scofield

Reviewed by Mary Barnes

An accomplished poet and playwright, Gregory Scofield writes of love in his book of poetry, Love Medicine and one Song. For this re-issue of his 1997 book, Warren Cariou has written a comprehensive study of the eroticism that permeates the pages. Reading his fine introduction and his interpretation of the poet’s work left me wondering what there was left to say. Cariou talks about how Scofield explores the elasticity of love, its ability to go beyond gender, its impermanence. It is because of this impermanence that love cannot be boxed, cornered or categorized, that it endures and emerges transformed.

The poems are beautiful, the visuals stunning, as in the haunting “I dream flute songs, / chase the echo / in my heart’s canyon” (80), referring to the pursuit of love and the depth of that love.

The design of the poems resembles a series of circles, swirling and tumbling into one another. Ever changing, they gather the different aspects of love, meld, and diverge, and all the time the poems and their meaning move towards acceptance.

In the first section, called “Earth and Textures,” the poet writes of the duality of earth and the roles she plays in love. She is a lodge opening her arms to embrace us: “pi-pihtâkwey, pi-pihtâkwey” (come in, come in). Then changing to moon mother, she opens her arms to give us flight into our own discovery of love: “a sacred moon mother / birthing stars / for my dream path” (7).

In “Drive By,” Scofield writes of another love, the longing for a love long vacated:

For months now
I’ve crept by, headlights blaring
all my jagged dreams,
these shameless nights
and moon’s snicker. (36)

The poet gives us a new connotation to the expression “drive by,” describing the yearning and loneliness of a stalking love. Scofield pulls us in another direction, showing us with the moon’s laughter, the lover’s foolishness in the pursuit of a love intangible.

“Twelve Moons” gives each month its change, its season in its rendering of the divisions of the year. Here Scofield illustrates the transformation of love. “Pinâskowi-pism / October / The Migrating Moon” is the story of moon and coyote, an old love song that continues despite or perhaps because of the ongoing battle between two principles of nature. “To tell this story / would take about one winter” (54), the poet writes with wry humour. The transformation of love here is Scofield’s passion for the Cree story, which he transforms into the shape of a poem.

In “Love Medicine,” the warning from old ones to be careful, for love can be dangerous, goes unheeded because
. . . three words he whispers
so wild horses
fill my ears, my heart
runs reckless,
so I forget the sermon
these rain shadows
hovering. (81)

The whispers of love make the lovers forget the danger; so overwhelmed by desire, their bodies are
dreaming into being one song.

The poet’s marrying of Cree and English phrasing and his inclusion of Cree stories adds richness
to the poems and gives them depth.

Scofield’s poems are powerful and they are healing. In his portrayal, love endures because it
does change, and because of this adaptation, there is hope for humans. ♡

Mary Barnes is a writer living in Wasaga Beach, Ontario.


Buy Love Medicine and one Song at McNally-Robinson Booksellers (click on the line below):
http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com/searchresults?txtSearchSearchType=keyword&txtSearchFulltextCriteria=love+medicine+and+one+song&txtSearchMode=sitewide