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Inventory at the All-Night Drugstore by Erika Meitner. Tallahassee, Florida: Anhinga Press, 2003. 112. \$12, paper.

The poems in Erika Meitner's award-winning first book take inventory of a life lived, and they do not find it, or the world in which that life is lived, wanting. These poems are blessed with, and bless us with, a fullness of imagined experience, a fullness that includes a faith in the possibility of experience being a teacher and a lover and a healer and a eulogist and a mother and a confidant—all at once. It is, finally, the world and our passage through it that shapes both our bodies and the words our mouths find faith enough to offer to that world as a kind of notice of our passing through it. As "Keloid," one of the poems in the final section of the book, puts it (in the voice of a young Jewish woman trying to explain, to defend, her tattoos, a kind of "marking that her religion would deny her but that her faith not only allows but appreciates),

everything is permanent—
whether we mark it or not,
it marks us.

The poems that make up this inventory of experience are obsessed with this notion of marking—of being marked, of making marks, of being marked by. Whether they deal with the child coming to terms with experience, or the dawns of sexual love (or the desire to, as an adult, try to actually have faith in the possibilities opened up by that physical desire), whether they deal with the role of work in the shaping of a life, or the necessity of faith to understand and survive the physical world and how it forms us, the poems in this book refuse to deny the sensual nature of experience. These poems do not turn their backs to the world in order to find song; these poems look to the world for song and find it there. An example is found in the young girls on the school bus in "P.S. 221 Goes to the Museum of Natural History," who use the motion of their young bodies, their fists "pulling down / invisible handles from the air," to elicit a kind of music from the driver of an eighteen-wheeler, a man who knew, the poet says through the naive voice of the child, that "this was our only way to make the world / sing on cue." These poems use their "bodies," their forms, to make of the world a music—one that in turn moves us to dance into and through the worlds these poems make for us.

These poems are narrative, but they are narratives that want to make meaning, not just tell stories. And they are narratives concerned with the essence of work and love and faith, and what binds all these together in the world of things and experience. These poems are infused with the wisdom that, as the end of "Elegy" puts it,

the female body
must be marked
before it can serve

as a vehicle
for the spirit.

The “bodies” of these poems revel in the markings left in them (and on them) of the world and, through that revelry, through the refusal to deny the self as being, at least in part, a body moving through a physical world full of moving bodies, they find ways of touching on and expressing the world of faith, the world of the spirit, that is, always, as these poems serve to prove, the larger and more real world we move through.

-George Looney, Penn State Erie