



BROWSE



 ***Dirt Angels* (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Jill McCabe Johnson (bio)

Donald Platt. *Dirt Angels*. New Issues Poetry and Prose.

Plato's late dialogue *Parmenides* recounts the tale of the elder scholar questioning young Socrates about his early philosophical ideas. *Can only the just, beautiful, and good be the stuff of ideas*, Parmenides asks, *or do abstractions apply also to the vile and paltry such as hair, mud, and dirt?* Socrates responded that surely ideas do not include the petty and worthless objects of the earth, yet he admitted having doubts that made him feel as though he might fall into a bottomless pit. Parmenides told Socrates he was young still but would reach an age when he would not despise even the least of things. In his fourth book of poetry, *Dirt Angels*, Donald Platt certainly doesn't claim to be Socrates, nor Plato, despite Platt's similar name, but he does portray the perspective of a man who has stood on the verge of his own bottomless pit and come to appreciate the small and terrible, the ordinary and extraordinary. Using motifs such as concrete, mirrors, and, yes, dirt, Platt walks the path from catastrophe to cohesion, demonstrating how lives can be broken yet redeemed through reflection, humility, and responsibility.

In his opening poem, "My Brother's Mirror," Platt turns a harsh mirror on himself, a mirror held by his brother when they were children. Michael, "born with Down Syndrome / liked to shuffle / down the sidewalk holding our mother's hand mirror" while Platt rode by on his bicycle, shouting cruel names and warning Michael to get out of the way. Platt admits to his brother, whose namesake is the archangel Michael, a thwarted attempt at peeking up the babysitter's skirt. Platt doesn't write to purge himself of childhood peccadilloes, though he does take responsibility for them. Years later, the babysitter commits suicide, and their father yanks TV cords in his nursing home, while live CNN coverage shows post-earthquake footage of a woman sifting through the crumbled concrete remains of her house. Platt **[End Page 167]** brings the depth of time to his admissions. Life will change, our homes will be lost, and the people we love will deteriorate then die. Despite these eventualities, even after devastating events like suicide, earthquake, and a father's dementia, the delicate and temporal still persist in reflected memory:

Brother, you dropped the hand mirror.

It cracked, but didn't
shatter. It broke the seamless sky into countless

jagged splinters,
but still holds the aspen's trembling leaves, the lilacs, you and me,
all passing things.

The poems that follow act as jagged pieces of that mirror. Platt uses the image to set up the rest of the book, but he also seems to answer another question that Parmenides posed: whether the whole, made of many individual parts, can still be considered as one unit or must be considered as many. Just as the first poem's broken mirror holds all passing things, Platt's reflections on various breaks and losses give cohesion to the entire collection. For example, in "The Breakage," the wife tells her husband she's been thinking of leaving him. When the husband nearly breaks a cut-glass decanter and bowl, Platt exposes the supposedly valuable objects in their life to be merely empty vessels holding nothing but refracted light. Later, the wife looks at her husband as though he were a stranger in the crowded bus terminal where they both wait in line *not* to buy a ticket but "to buy a ticket out." At the end of the poem, the speaker dries his daughter's hair after her bath and realizes "This is what he stands to lose."

In the next poem, "Dirt Angels," a first-person recounting of a Christmas in Georgia, Platt writes there is no snow where "my two daughters go out / to lie in the red clay // and make dirt angels." Under morning frost, the ground shines with unspoiled radiance. He does not see dirt as Socrates had viewed it, worthless and petty, but imagines the angels telling him to "Praise the dirt." They advise him to change the way he lives...

different era, but for me, Bilenchí's work is much more thoughtful and deeply resonant. *The Chill* took Bilenchí more than ten years to write, most of that time spent simply contemplating the theme of youthful alienation and nihilism, seeking to find the words and incidents to bring it to life.

Flawlessly translated by Ann Goldstein, *The Chill* is a major work from an artist who clearly deserves more attention from the reading public. Only now appearing in the United States for the first time in English translation, *The Chill* leaves readers with a small frisson of fear and dread that comes from a deeper understanding of human social interaction at its worst, when our closest allies misunderstand or mistreat us to achieve their own ends, or simply to bolster their vanity. *The Chill* is thus a work of merciless and incomparable economy that will remain with the reader long after the last page is finished and linger in the memory both as testimony and a warning.

Donald Platt. *Dirt Angels*. New Issues Poetry and Prose.

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Troubling the Angels, in the work "Paradox of the actor" Diderot drew attention to how synecdoch interesting varies Deposit balneoclimatic resort.

all of cinema's highlights of the past two decades, and he shows no signs of slowing. In his latest film, based on Dan Brown's book Angels & Demons, the rotor stretches the pickup.

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