Book Review

Kanapé Fontaine, N. (2015). *Do not enter my soul in your shoes* (H. Scott, Trans.). Toronto, ON: Mawenzi House. ISBN-13: 978-1-927494516

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's collection of poems offers an implicit invitation and warning in its title: *Do Not Enter My Soul in Your Shoes*. Readers are invited into a sacred space, yet there is no guarantee they will understand it nor avoid becoming a trespasser. Perhaps it is important to note then that I am a white woman, of settler heritage, born on the Canadian prairies, far west of the poet's home, the Innu community of Pessamit, Quebec, whose roads are sometimes mentioned by name in the poems.

The works are concise, most poems less than a page and most lines a few words, possibly reflecting Kanapé Fontaine's experience in slam poetry which demands careful selection of vocabulary, potent precision. There is much that speaks of blending. Blending of peoples, of histories, of land and body. It is unclear in her poems if the land is personified or if people walk about only as strange extensions of the land. Perhaps the blending lends itself to blurring the lines and boundaries which colonial powers have so often arbitrarily drawn. There is the blending of language, this English translation of originally French work includes many Innu words and religious terms. Yet there is tension – historical and contemporary – in holding all of this together and Kanapé Fontaine's poems are equally capable of eliciting a sense of loss as a sense of hope. She speaks of nature, its caresses and creatures, on almost every page. Her poems to her grandfather and grandmother are especially poignant. Through her deep connection to land and people, the poet bravely invites readers to enter, barefoot, *nitassinan*, "our land".

Despite the collection's brevity, the poems are thought provoking. I read the whole work three times, but read and re-read individual works many more times as I attempted to glean a little more of their meaning.

"my lament is a land
its peoples erased." (p. 40)

Are the people of the land gone, erased, no longer nomadic? Or have the people who live there now erased the land, harnessed it for their purposes, forgetting to live in harmony? I found myself pondering this while walking around my current city of residence - Calgary, Alberta. Of course, it has been known for much longer as Mohkinstsis in Blackfoot and carries the weight of many other names and peoples. The poems urged me to consider my relationship to this land. My childhood was spent moving every few years, affording me the opportunity to appreciate many different horizons, but I have always felt a certain peace when looking out across my prairie home - mountains visible in the distance. Kanapé's words invited me to consider how my relationship to this land might be different if I knew that for thousands of years my ancestors survived and thrived on this same earth, in the shadow of those same rocky giants. Her words continue to echo long after the page is turned. The questions continue to chafe.

I can admit that many of the poems' meanings remain mysterious. Perhaps my settler shoes are still on. However, I was able and wanting to return to them, to ponder the rich lines and wonder what my blue eyes were missing.

"See without looking,
Look without seeing,
You have hands full of stories." (p. 58)

I think any reader will find they are invited by these poems, not into silence, but to be silent and hear another's story. I humbly submit that Kanapé Fontaine's first published collection of poems is most definitely worth reading, pondering over, and learning from.

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