

BUTTONED INTO HISTORY BY RICHARD MOORE

Reviewed by Oke Mbachu

Buttoned into History is Richard Moore's latest book of poetry. Reading this collection, one comes to the conclusion that Moore cannot be pigeon-holed into a specific type of poetry genre. He is not a political poet; he is not a humor poet; he is not an historical poet; he is not a contemporary poet; he is not a rhyming poet—he is in fact all of those, and this is evident in this collection that runs the gamut from Ancient Rome to Contemporary America, addressing numerous topics in the process. Above all, he is an experienced and deliberate poet and this shows in the book's multi-themed poems, and in his careful and clever handling of meter and rhyme.

The poems in this collection start out on a mostly political slant, addressing the nature and paradox of the American political system. "To a Writer of Political Poems" portrays a speaker that accuses his/her 'rival' of being a fanatic. The irony lies in the fact that, in the speaker's fervor, s/he is exhibiting/developing the same attitudes that s/he accuses the other of: "The other side? Fanatics!'/ you rage in your emphatics,/ fanaticism hatching./ The malady is catching." While the poem displays the hypocrisy inherent in politics, it also shows Moore's adherence to rhyme and meter. For a short poem, it manages to speak volumes. The next poem, "Politicians," has the speaker calling politicians a few choice words (pick up a copy to find out what), but is more than its face value suggests. Again, this poem exhibits a strict command of meter and rhyme, but it is the satirical edge, and its ironic ending, that gives the poem its crowning achievement. In some later poems, the commitment to strict meter sometimes makes for fresh and interesting yet satisfactory line breaks. Sarcasm is also a principle element in some poems in this volume, and this helps amplify the width (and humor) of the poems.

"For the Coming Matriarchy" is in the same vein as "Politicians", commending women on their various abilities, while denouncing the gaffes of patriarchy. However, the poem's last line should take most readers for a loop, their jaws hanging open in surprise and/or laughter. The remarkable thing about these poems is that their humor strikes a good balance with the severity of their themes, and that the message is not lost in the process. "Overman" is a thoughtful poem that questions our intellectual and technological addiction, while wondering whether the simple, nature-based life might not be our salvation after all. Similarly, "Brave New World" questions the results of technological civilization, and its impact on human progress. Like most of the poems in this collection, it ends on an eye-opening note, stating that "Modernity!'/ In its storms, rages,/ sometimes we see/ The Middle Ages." "Breakfast in Sussex" and "Telescopes" present a more metaphysical side, and suggest an interconnectedness between all things. (The latter poem might remind some of a memorable Emily Dickinson poem "The brain— is wider than the sky.")

There are practical references to Roman and Greek mythology and other histories (The Brownings find their way into a poem, as does Xerxes) and some parallels are drawn

between the Roman empire and the contemporary United States. History is presented as an informant of the present. This is fitting, as the book's title suggests the status quo's inseparability from the past, that the past is threaded into, and influences, the present. The poems in this volume loom all the more relevant in our current sociopolitical reality. These are intelligent, well-crafted poems that will reward multiple readings.

Buttoned into History is available through Pivot Press.

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