

Martha Ronk, *In a Landscape of Having to Repeat* (Richmond: Omnidawn, 2004)

What does it mean to be in a landscape of having to repeat? Poet Martha Ronk spends ninety-one pages addressing this very question in her most recent book aptly titled, *In a Landscape of Having to Repeat*.

Each page comprised of that which is familiar and that which is not; a prosaic phrase followed by inquiry and vice versa. This is Ronk's method of investigating the landscape of the daily, one that is relentlessly repetitive yet never quite within the perimeter of our understanding. Yesterday becomes today and tomorrow replicates yesterday and the days thereafter bring forth patterns we have both seen and not seen, but by means of what process?

Ronk investigates a number of scenarios that fit within the parameters of the quotidian; though in the end the parameters are perhaps not quite what the reader or even the poet herself may have anticipated. For the most part Ronk relies on her own version of empiricism to bring forth some version of the truth, though at times turns to other thinkers to facilitate the development of her own thoughts. In the second section, "In the Vicinity", she periodically inserts Freud's own views on the topic at hand, and by the end of the section the reader is a witness to the realization of Ronk's conception of frames and screens. Though, however developed and well-wrought her pieces are, when seen both individually and collectively, there is no conclusion, there is no answer delivered. What there is however is perhaps a greater valuation of that which can be found in the repetition of our days and their ceaseless yet forever perplexing patterns. Yes, she speaks of the quotidian, and in fact titles her third section by that very word, but she does so in the manner in which she does everything else; with poise, with intelligence, and with innovation.

After all is where one ends up unrepentant because what else is
there to do.
Well I just got here and what I see after all that has come before

In the three sections of her book, each containing verse both written and arranged differently, Ronk addresses the range of processes that determine the nature of our days. Whether it is in a sequence of prose poems, a series of brief thoughts, or a section of more traditional pieces, she succeeds in constructing a work

that consistently and rigorously addresses themes of interest to the poet; repetition, the daily, and the details to be found therein.

The book is an aggregate of divergent verse and the poet places her lines on each page, in a register that at first glance seems to be the language of conversation, a transcript of common thoughts, though it is by means of her careful and strategic approach that these lines stretch beyond one's anticipation of them. Careful, but not too careful. The lines begin to take a turn bringing the reader to unanticipated intersections, junctions of the poet's ideas and the potentiality that resides therein. It is for the reader to render such language dormant or active. Will the reader engage the lexicon and its neighborhood of letters, words, and phrases, and assess what Ronk herself is trying to assess? Will we situate ourselves, at a given moment, only to soon find that stance inverted by another? She writes:

If any one thing is moved even inches from its place
The entire composition is ruined.
Who can find it when you do that.

It is by no means profound to reach for the semantics of any given moment, though Ronk is not chasing notions of profundity. Instead, she is a poet reaching for information and reaching in a way that is certainly less than common and ultimately quite compelling.

Shapeless fog meets the shapeless trees
In an articulation of wires outwitting fog.

Inherent to her voice as a poet is a certain sophistication though it seems a natural extension of the poet's way a negotiating the circuitry of life. There is a consistent tension between the elegance and more prosaic utterances, the high and low diction; never too high nor too low.

Balancing tones in poetry is always a challenge to the poet, and Ronk demonstrates, or perhaps reiterates her skills as a writer in this work. as her former works speak for themselves. And quite frankly so does, *In a Landscape of Having to Repeat*. But reviews are as incessant as the days that Ronk attempts to understand.

“Quotidian”, the third and final section of the book, is worth looking at, not only as it is, but also as it stands in comparison to a body of work that was written approximately two thousand years ago; Greek lyric poetry. There is no indication that this is what the poet herself intended but nevertheless the parallel seems there for the taking- there is a brevity and a subsequent cadence to be found in Greek Lyric poetry that one may find in this section of Ronk’s book. It is not a matter of equating the styles, but elements of them.

Greek lyric poetry came forth at a time when “aristocratic influence was diminishing and the common man came to hold a more important place in society, a new, less formal poetic style was called for, one which would allow for the varieties of personal utterance.” And so it is for Ronk, as she attempts to examine the everyday through her terse lines and their resultant rhythm. After all, doesn’t the day belong to everyone, common man and emperor alike?

Each page, each poem is a meeting place for the personal, the philosophical and the nuances of each. Ronk’s diction is written in a register that is at once informal and formal. Even the most casual musings are at times nothing if not complex.

Her tone is one of determination, of following up on questions asked, but ultimately inconclusive. She suggests and inquires and leaves the reader to follow suit. Urging us to follow her lead, to ask perhaps what isn’t designed to be answered.

You look familiar to me he says.
What can one say about what is familiar and why what
 Seemed so at first
Turns out to be inconsolable?