

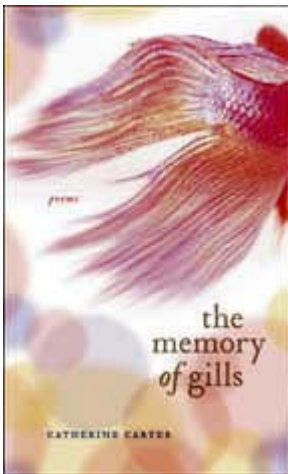


Catherine Carter, photo by Mark Haskett

The Memory of Gills: Poems by Catherine Carter

(Baton Rouge, LA: [Louisiana State University Press](#), 2006)

The Memory of Gills is altogether an astonishing, seductive, and finally irresistible book of poems. Carter is a skillful, imaginative, and witty visionary. Here is a poet who hears the voices of the sensate world calling, pleading, cajoling, and although she says, in her poem "Hearing Things," "I don't / know how to answer, what / to say," don't believe her. She does know. And her poems say what she knows with a zest and inventiveness that no reader will soon forget. -- Kathryn Stripling Byer



Raised by Wolves

Don't think the move to town didn't take:
like Mowgli, I married human.
Like the seal-girls, I was glad,
though they can't live too close to the dunes
and I prune the woods from my yard,
rake up the leaves that rustle and hiss
like paws under moon-gray trees.
I married human, and since I was
after all speciously human too,
they said it seemed like fate,
even the wolves. When I visit the den,
we nuzzle and scratch,
(that opposable thumb, so handy).
I tell them the humans live in pieces,
ask why they use air machines
on such cool nights, if we're the last
wolves; since the new strip mall,
we've seen no more. Then
I lope for town, pause at a road-kill:
possum, sweet as persimmon but rank
with burst bowels and feces. In the suburbs
I catch a cab. Back again, I circle
twice and snuggle against my spouse;
at this hour he's most like a wolf.
If I dream of veins, it's his neck
my blunt fangs graze, but I learned
in the woods how to mate for life,
though the mate is different. Don't think
I feel sorry for myself, or him: those years
in the leaves were the meat of my life,
and everyone marries into another species.

A Different Story

The folding web below
my thumb is growing. Other
skin slackens and creases,
bristles spring from my chin,
fat grows harder
to combat. No doubt
you'll call this age,
or sloth, but I know

better. These are signs.
No one would say
where Grandma went, or Aunt
Cornele, but I can guess,
now that I am becoming a seal.

Yes. I forego my thumbs,
I am standing in the surf,
now falling forward, now
flying. (Forty years
ago he gave me pearls,
a sign of water not
wealth; certain tears
were only the pledge of salt.)
Alewives, leaping pale
in the phosphorescent sea,
moon on the climbing breakers,
wait for me -- my spotted skin,
my fused fingers -- any night
now I'll be there.

Leaving Love

Maybe you cry a little, take a lot of last
looks, like you did at the beach when you were
small: throwing out the jars still half-full
of mustard or raspberry jam, taking the last
crusts of bread down the sand for the gulls,
saying, *no, this was beautiful, this was our
dune, our sea-oats, won't we see the dolphins
one more time, good-bye, good-bye!*
And the drive away is long, hot, your house
when you finally get there in the late
afternoon fusty, full of thirsty fleas that have drunk
nothing for a week. You think of the wind
and sand, the sweets you never get
the rest of the year, and your heart shrinks.
Unpacking's worse than packing, somehow,
and everyone's tired and cross, no one says
how good you were to give it all up, come back.
But the next morning is a little better;
the windows are open again, you've lain
in your own bed, hugged the dogs who dumbly
mourned you for a week, and look,

it's August, here are your books, it's time
to wash clothes (though you keep one towel
out, to smell the salt), time to come home,
wake in the summer morning to mow
the lusty grass, weed the tomatoes and beans,
let go, take hold, bang open the rusty
screen door back into your own days.

Catherine Carter's poems have appeared in Poetry, North Carolina Poetry Review, Cider Press Review, and other journals. A native of the tidewater region of Maryland, she now lives in Cullowhee, where she is an assistant professor of English at Western Carolina University. The publication of her book is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The poems drawn from it are reprinted by permission of Louisiana State University Press from The Memory of Gills: Poems by Catherine Carter, Copyright © 2006 Catherine Carter.