



Earthquake Weather: Poems (Sun Tracks)

Janice Gould

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It's unmistakable, that strangely calm air and sky that signals big change ahead: earthquake weather. These are familiar signs to Janice Gould, a poet, a lesbian, and a mixed-blood California Indian of Koyangk'auwi Maidu descent. Her sense of isolation is intense, her search for identity is relentless, and her words can take one's breath away. Sometimes accepting, sometimes full of anger, Gould's work is rare, filtered through the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of a lesbian of Indian heritage. Over and over again, she speaks as an outsider looking in at the lives of others—through a doorway, out of a car window, or from the shambles of a broken relationship.

Showing a steady courage in the midst of this alienation, her words are also stark testimony to the struggle of an individual caught in social and emotional contexts defined by others. In *Earthquake Weather*, as in an evolving friendship, Gould opens herself to the reader in stages. "I did not know how lonely I was / till we began to talk," she writes in an opening section, setting the introspective tone of what's to come. She begins with a focus on those universal truths that both bind us and isolate us from each other: the pain of loss, the finality of death, our longing to see beneath the surface of things. Next, the poet turns to her growing-up years during the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. She describes a family in turmoil and an Indian heritage that, oddly, was one of the factors that made her feel most disconnected from other people. And she writes poignantly about her increasing alienation from prescribed sexual roles. "What's wrong with me? / Where do I belong? Why / am I here? Why can't I / hold on?" Finally, as in a trusting friendship, Gould offers the reader vivid word portraits of relationships in her life—women she has loved and who have loved her.

Erotic and deeply personal, these poems serve as both a reconciliation and affirmation of her individuality. "Yet would you deny / that between women desire exists / that in our friendship a delicate / and erotic strand of fire unites us?" The poems in this book, says critic Toby Langen, are most powerful for their "courageous drawing on experience and feelings." They will speak to many general readers as well as anyone interested in questions of gender and identity, including students of literature, lesbian/women's studies, social/cultural studies, or American Indian studies.

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