

A Review of “Pomegranate” by Monique Shanice Wilbert

In *Pomegranate*, Monique Shanice Wilbert debut poetry collection invites us to read between the lines of her life— amid her exploration of beauty and the loud voices of trauma.

The opening poem, “Mortal Coils” celebrates a tender moment— a mother “fashioning lovely braids.” A daughter’s “wild hair” is a corporeal framework of how mainstream may perceive blackness. I imagine as the mother styles her daughter’s hair; she empowers her young daughter find the authenticity of beauty in her own reflection— stating with pride to “*look what God made / her hands coated in the bluest of magic*. Too often, European expectations is of African Americans taming their hair to set mainstream at ease. And perhaps the mother uses *Blue Magic Conditioner*, a hair product, not to straighten the hair but to strengthen the texture of its nature.

Beauty can be found in the cool girls / affections before navigating the “firebomb” of loss; leaving imperishable images of charred children / it is the thing I cannot wash. Wilbert addresses the fear as a metaphor for what lurks in dark corners waiting for me / childhood, a strange aftertaste; and how “men made choices for me.”

Clearly the author writes from a place of weight while endeavoring to excise the shadows within. She confronts and contrasts the illusiveness of beauty as “suitable and fair / some unmade and darkling thing / standing atop the stair looking down. Sometimes the thing desired peers from a place of persecution.

In her title poem, the author explores the pomegranate and possibilities of love and “sharing in the feast of fruit.” She asks, “What is Blood” and responds it is not red / it is my granddaddy's eyes; alluding to something inflamed or festering. Later realizing that she is the curve of my mother's hip / moon in father's eyes.

From this collection the author carries to the surface the pervasiveness of fear in this metaphoric line; they wrestle me down / they stand on my breath. Blood is a vital fluid— good or bad, it bleeds into emotional connections and violence. “He Drank My Mother Up,” is an exploitation of erasure; as in a “middle passage harvest.” These lines suggest enslavement— the past and the present; and how women in volatile relationships are treated as “property prizes.” The author melds the imaginings of history to tell her mother’s story; perhaps her own or the women who are subjected to any form of emotional colonization.

The power of Wilbert’s collection is her seemingly an out of body experience in the knowing. The ebb and flow of her narrative are chapters of her conflicted voice— “her tremble voice.” She shares that her body is “hidden in lies.” While the “crushed fruit” is an exploration of her poignant memories— and the grace of opening the pomegranate of transformation. Wilbert seeks rebirth from these seeds, and looks forward to a life of hope “in the pasture of the living.”

About the author: Sandra Rivers-Gill is an award-winning poet, playwright, and performer. She is the Poet Ambassador of Northwest Ohio representing the Ohio Poetry Association. Having led a number of poetry residencies, she serves as an Ohio Arts Council teaching artist. Her poetry has been found in numerous journals and anthologies where she was nominated for the Best of the Net and the Pushcart Poetry Prize. Her debut poetry collection, “As We Cover Ourselves With Light” is a finalist for the 2024 Eric Hoffer Book Award.