



Doubters and Dreamers (Sun Tracks)

Janice Gould

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Doubters and Dreamers opens with a question from a young girl faced with the spectacle of Indian effigies lynched and burned “in jest” before UC Berkeley’s annual Big Game against Stanford: “What’s a debacle, Mom?” This innocent but telling question marks the girl’s entrée into the complicated knowledge of her heritage as a mixed-blood Native American of Koyangk’auwi (Concow) Maidu descent. The girl is a young Janice Gould, and the poems and narrations that follow constitute a remarkable work of sustained and courageous self-revelation, retracing the precarious emotional terrain of an adolescence shaped by a mother’s tough love and a growing consciousness of an ancestral and familial past.

In the first half of the book, “Tribal History,” Gould ingeniously repurposes the sonnet form to preserve the stories of her mother and aunt, who grew up when “muleback was the customary mode / of transport” and the “spirit world was present”—stories of “old ways” and places claimed in memory but lost in time. Elsewhere, she remembers her mother’s “ferocious, upright anger” and her unexpected tenderness (“Like a miracle, I was still her child”), culminating in the profound expression of loss that is the poem “Our Mother’s Death.”

In the second half of the book, “It Was Raining,” Gould tells of the years of lonely self-making and “unfulfilled dreams” as she comes to terms with what she has been told are her “crazy longings” as a lesbian: “It’s been hammered into me / that I’ll be spurned / by a ‘real woman,’ / the only kind I like.” The writing here commemorates old loves and relationships in language that mingles hope and despair, doubt and devotion, veering at times into dreamlike moments of consciousness. One poem and vignette at a time, *Doubters and Dreamers* explores what it means to be a mixed-blood Native American who grew up urban, lesbian, and middle class in the West.

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