

Cultural Daily

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Conversation with Poet Gloria Mindock

Susan Tepper · Friday, July 29th, 2022

Recently poet Susan Tepper got together with poet Gloria Mindock to talk about destruction, hearts, and Gloria's new poetry collection Ash, which is based on true crime stories. Here's what they said:

Susan Tepper (ST): Yesterday, when I asked if you'd like to talk about your multi-prize-winning poetry collection *Ash*, the tragedy at the Highland Park July 4th Parade had not yet occurred. It was still early in the morning when you and I decided to talk about *Ash*. So I'm going to ask you my questions, knowing they will be tempered by this and other similar tragedies that have become dark shadings of life today. *Ash* doesn't reduce the truth of any moment in its collected poems. What made you decide to title such a varied collection with the word *Ash*?

Gloria Mindock (GM): It is titled *Ash* because that is all a person has left after destruction. I thought about how everything dies, burns, and fades in life such as relationships, houses, nature, war, and the heart. Even murder, such as when there is domestic violence, a relationship gone wrong, or someone splinters and kills at random. People always seem to want to share the horrible side of life with me. It must be my 40 years of working as a social worker following me. I decided to take the book a step further and add fire elements.

ST: You mention the heart. Somehow, all the way back to B.C., the heart became a symbol of love and the focal point of all other emotions, good and evil. You mentioned the heart can become part of the destruction process, too. I believe that. Once the heart turns the wrong way, the possibilities are endless, as evidenced in this partial first stanza of your poem titled "A/K":

K sliced open his stomach.
"Blood drips," he said.

His heart was biting for love.
He had a deadline to make.

Do not misinterpret this.
Immorality is rationed...

Some who have studied the human heart, from the perspective of emotional reasoning, claim the soul exists within the heart. Deepak Chopra believes the soul exists outside the body. I, personally, wrestle with both theories.

GM: That poem “A/K” appears in the final and 4th section of the book titled *Opposition*. The first stanza is the man [A] talking and the second stanza the woman [K] speaks her turn. All these poems were inspired by true crime. I read so much of it, watch documentaries about serial killers, and love watching forensic shows. When the heart is bad or destructive, it shows in human behavior. This stanza you selected finishes with “His story ended before he could do any more.” He [A] decided to end his life. We are left wondering if he is guilty of committing horrible acts and could not take it anymore, or it’s from rejection by the woman [K]. The woman’s reaction is something you do not expect.

ST: This use of letters to indicate the speaker is a compelling choice. It gives edge because we can’t get a glimpse of them as with common usage names such as Steve and Mary. Instead, the letters create distance which forces the reader, acting almost in a void, to make choices or take sides. I love this approach, it’s very fresh.

But jumping back to Section One which you titled “Burnt.” Your poem “Messses” is so relatable:

How many messes do I have to clean up / for what comes out of your mouth? / After the fire died out, the ashes were swept. / No house, no clothes, no furniture, no books, nothing left. / No sign of us living there. / Life is funny sometimes. / It takes fire after fire until the water comes. / It was cool, soothing, beautiful and glowing. / Unfortunately now, / there is only the dimness / of the sunset, / happening too many times.

In this poem there’s the fire, then the water and the cool soothing beauty. I found these particular near-to-ending lines to be almost a birth or a form of re-birth:

Life is funny sometimes. It takes fire after fire until the water comes. It was cool, soothing, beautiful and glowing.

GM: I love the different reactions I get to some of my poems. This poem is not about re-birth at all. Some people never get their relationships right. They jump from person to person or end up with the same type of person time after time. It is a destructive relationship that fails. What is left? Nothing. The person, if they learn, hopefully will choose the right one, then the water will be beautiful, but most of the time, it’s too late. The last line of the poems shows us this. The person ends up cleaning mess after mess from the men in her life who are total jerks.

ST: Life can definitely be a hairy mess. Reminds me of the Eugene O’Neill play *The Hairy Ape*. I am enamored by the humor that is intrinsic to who you are as a person. Humor that often resolves things by the end of the poem, not by sucking up but by being realistic, throwing your pail of water then moving along. For instance, your poem from the “Buried” section that you titled “Escape”:

Trying to escape, but I am surrounded by flatland.
No place to go.
If I stand behind the tree, you will find me,
behind the barn, you will find me,
behind the house, you will find me.

You would not expect me to hide
down by the Illinois River or in the
caves of Starved Rock. I will be there until
my body decays.

I will become a beautiful plant.
When you walk past, I will
give you a rash.

This is one of the most exquisite perfect endings. She will become a beautiful plant that will poison him. Tra-la!

GM: I had so much fun writing this poem. The ending came fast. You would be surprised how many stories I hear from people wanting revenge.

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ASH by Gloria Mindock

Purchase ASH by Gloria Mindock (Glass Lyre Press)

Purchase ASH by Gloria Mindock (Amazon)

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