Bruce Hunter
For Canadian Poetries a review of

**XI by Micheline Maylor**

Your sister finds you at dinner time
on the floor
the television still on
bowl smashed on the floor
ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygodoh
mygodohmygodbreathjustbreath
“Starfish”

Patrick Lane says Micheline Maylor is “a poet to read and to wait for”, on the
cover of *Whirr and Click* (Frontenac House, 2013), her second full-length
collection preceded by a chapbook,
Starfish (Rubicon Press, 2011), and Full Depth: The Raymond Knister Poems (Wolsak & Wynn, 2007).

Micheline Maylor is a gifted scholar, editor and critic. But what of her poetry? Whirr and Click is the very fine and varied collection of a poet who had found her voice(s).

One of the many paths to poetry is the heart’s reckoning with reason. Another is the opposite, how the mind considers the matters of the heart. Maylor’s agile mind is married to a fierce heart; together, they capture an enviable range of human passions. And she can spin a conceit like nobody.
In the first instance of the heart, is the stunning end piece of the collection, the long poem, “Starfish”: first published by Jenna Butler’s Rubicon Press. I can see why this chapbook quickly sold out.

In the instance of the mind is “Rabbit”. Long poems may well be a strength of Maylor’s, allowing her to draw on her considerable rhetorical abilities. Here, she lampoons so many things, not least of all herself, little is left unscorched.

Rabbit, you fucker, I have a faulty Shaman
and you are no spirit animal, you’re
just the twerp that shows up on my lawn
leaving raisinettes for the dog to eat.
My spirit quest has gone awry.

I find Maylor really funny in this poem and many others.

Elsewhere she offers insights into love’s darker realm as in “Dangerous Men”, and the striking prose poem “Even the done” where “Marisol tied her husband, Juan, to a kitchen chair and with letters of her ex-lover inflicted deep paper cuts in his skin. On the twenty-third day, he begged her unfairness.” Maylor gives us
obsession, longing, and Borgesian myth-making.

Maylor is the heart reckoning with reason and vice versa. And while her poetic characters do get up to things, her work is grounded in audaciously spare, brave language.

And always, it’s about the people. If there was ever an example to illustrate the difference between sentiment and sentimentality, it is the elegiac “Starfish:” quoted at the top here. In the book’s notes, Maylor mentions a friend, L.A.M. for whom the poem is written: “I miss you Marmaduking me, pumpkin.” The understandable sentimentality we
gush about our children, pets, friends, and spouses.

In “Starfish” Maylor reclaims sentiment for poetry. She uses interior monologue, direct address, reportage, and the haunting refrain of the exact time of death, 11:15, February 14th, when her friend collapsed, preserved forever in her broken watch given to Maylor by L.A.M.’s sister.

There is no escape. The language is so disciplined, so spare, it amplifies absence to a deafening din. We are alone with Maylor, as was her friend in her death. “Starfish” is dramatic on the page
and in performance. But it is not sentimental.

In her second book, Maylor skilfully moves from poems like “On the 24th anniversary of losing my virginity” to “Rabbit” and “Starfish”. Lane is right. This is a poet to read and watch.

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