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Interview--Andrea Scarpino

By: Alexander E. Grashel



Andrea Scarpino received an MFA in Creative Writing from The Ohio State University. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and published in numerous journals, including: The Cincinnati Review, Connecticut Review, The Los Angeles Review, PANK, and Prairie Schooner. She is the author of the chapbook *The Grove Behind* (Finishing Line Press, 2009), as well as a full length book *Once, Then* (Red Hen Press, 2014), is a faculty member with Union Institute and University's Cohort Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies, and is a weekly contributor for the blog *Planet of the Blind*. She lives in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The interview was conducted orally, between Alexander E. Grashel, who was the interviewer, and the interviewee, Andrea Scarpino. The interview took place on Wednesday, April 2nd, 2014 around 1:30p.m. The staff of The East Fork Journal is forever grateful for Andrea Scarpino's contributions to UC Clermont, as well as to The East Fork Journal.

Was it hard for you to write about your childhood, rather than subject matter you could remove yourself from?

Yes and no. I write about my childhood, but I also don't write about my childhood. I collapse characters. I mean, this collection is obviously very personal to me, but not every single poem is actually my father. If he were to take a look at some of them, he would wonder where they came from. It's hard to write about yourself, but yet it is also easy to write about yourself because you know yourself best. It was harder in the revision process because I would get really attached to a memory that didn't really fit into the collection and I wouldn't really want to put it aside. In terms of the initial writing, I don't think it was any harder than writing about other subject matter.

What inspired you to have the connection with Persephone and Hades in this book?

It was really based on thinking about the underworld and resurrection. Persephone is a re-occurring character in a lot of elegies because of the resurrection aspect of the legend, but I'm more fascinated with the cyclical nature of it. And the pomegranate would come up again and again. It was such an important part of the elegies that I was reading that I felt that I really needed to put both of these images into my elegies.

Is the style of this book similar or different from other work you've written?

It's more personal than anything I've written. Even when I've written really personal experiences, I've done so from 6 miles away.

Why did you choose to organize the book this way—that is, in sections, but with subjects interwoven instead of all in one chunk?

It goes back to playing with white space. With heavy subject matter, the reader needs a break. It was important to me to provide this to the reader. I wanted the reader to go on a journey, I never say: "we're fine with grief". I wanted to walk the reader through these deep issues and provide a sense of progress where we never reach a point of acceptance of grief, but give the reader some closure.

Is there a style of poetry you're most comfortable writing, and what pulled you in that direction?

I think I'm a lyric poet. I love lyric poetry and sounds, and love playing with sounds and the beauty of language and be present with that. The poems I return to again and again are heavily lyrical and that has impacted my writing tremendously. I do write narrative poetry, but I always return to lyric poems.

What inspired you initially to write poetry? What continues to inspire you?

My mother was an artist and she brought music and art. And I love words and the way that words can shape a moment and the world or limit your perception of what is going on. I learned from writing this book that we don't have enough words for grieving in the English language, I don't get bored trying to come up with ways to describe things we don't have the words for.

What are you reading right now?

I'm reading a lot of book length poems: C.D. Wright and T.S Eliot, I go back to him often. More form-based reading: Carolyn Forché, Adrienne Rich, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost, as always.