

Bazaar, by Susan Wood. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
53 pp. \$5.95 (paper)

The most striking feature of this first book of poems is its relentless pursuit of "the consolation of pure loneliness." In the book as a whole, and in each poem individually, the desire for utter and unqualified self-containment is implicit. In the poem *I Want To Believe It*, the poet states outright, "I told you once I wanted closure..." and we realize that this is the ambition of the entire book. Thematically and structurally, the poems are in a constant process of sealing themselves off from the outer world. In *The Snow Dome*, the poet sees herself as living inside the hermetic boundaries of a paperweight, "where I've learned to dream of nothing/outside myself."

This is not to say that the outside world is not considered by the poet, it is, but the conclusions reached about it are bleak. The title poem establishes the view:

...as you gather
your memories around you like children
that were lost but are now
returned to you, your lover
will have become another lover, your bruises
other bruises, your death a different death,
so silently you didn't even notice.

Even memory, so often a consolation for our losses, is seen as an accomplice to deception; our losses anticipate us as we move unaware towards them, and even as we reach them they change, until "what matters is the way/ emptiness collects in the street, how it mourns/ the future." It is a grim philosophy that makes death and the certainty of undefinable loss the ordering forces of life.

For as often as the word appears, this volume might have been entitled *Grief*. In various poems we are told that "The cutting edge is grief"; a dream is "transparent

as grief"; "The body is a form of grief"; and that we stare into "the bright grief of mirrors." Rilke, in the *Duino Elegies*, makes grief a purging emotion, a working through of sorrow and loss to a profounder understanding of life. Susan Wood's grief is an unalterable condition of life, in which "The night sky isn't a mirror absorbing/our light, only the space for stars/to die in."

The language of this book is lean and exact. There are no flabby phrases or ragged edges. Ms. Wood knows what she wants to say and says it, however severe it may be. The style is imagistic and often disjointed; many of the poems are divided into sections, either numerically or by asterisks. The several parts appear to be going off in different directions, but are really circling back on themselves, making their way to the undeviating center of "a woman/with a gift for centers..." The last quoted line brings to mind Yeats' famous injunction, "the centre cannot hold."

These poems might be compared to the huge cloverleaves on interstate highways. In the midst of them, they seem intentionally confusing, if not confused, but at a little distance it becomes apparent that they not only contain their own internal logic, but are rather beautifully constructed, besides.

--Eric Nelson