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# Barbara Henning

## Sunday, October 30, 2011

### Rebecca Brown's *The Terrible Girls*

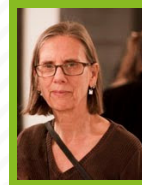
Last month I read Rebecca Brown's *The Terrible Girls*. It is a curious, combination of dream-story and science fiction, a bit like *The Twilight Zone* with a touch of sado-masochism, the characters allowing themselves to be wo-manhandled or doing the handling themselves. The "The Dark House" is one of my favorite.

In "The Dark House" a woman pursues the one she desires, by doing anything and everything for her. She grovels, becomes the coffee-cart girl, the hidden one, serving the conference star, her would-be lover, who blabs on and on at the podium with out-dated information. We have no idea what the conference is about. It's just in that middle realm of conference twilight zone. Someday, someday the girl will have the one she desires. Just "do things right" and "We are going to be part of a fine and lovely and long and true tradition." A kiss in the elevator and then out the door they go, running away from the conference. The coffee-cart girl carts the conference star on her back with her twisted ankle across a river and through the woods. Ah, here they are. Now you go away, the dominatrix demands, her ankle apparently recovered. A figure is in the house waiting for the desired-one. Brown carefully avoids telling us whether this figure upstairs is a man or a woman. And then she kicks the coffee-cart girl out and makes love to this other one, leaving the curtain open just a bit, with a promise, perhaps, for the coffee cart girl, too. The coffee-cart girl is a curious character, desiring someone who is so vacant and so demanding, and still wanting her, with a terrible driving desire.

"The Ruined City" reminds me a little of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Everything is ruined and beware of the gangs of roaming girls. No men here except Lord Bountiful. The narrator and her girlfriend hide from the terrible girls who fight over what they steal. The city they left behind before the disaster—they are here now searching for something the narrator left behind, "what was left of me," something hidden under the mat. "I tried to pick up what they'd hacked from me but I was weak and it was very heavy." Parts of her body? Too heavy she had to leave "it" behind. Her lover has super psychic powers. Kinesiology? She can hold her hands over the earth. Here it is here, she says. The bag is there and it's rotted away, "the resurrected heart." She gets her heart back like the tin man.

When I read these stories, I sometimes have the sense that the fictional writer is writing out of revenge, to get back at some lover, striving for fantastic fictional revenge. And there are these odd objects in each story that are pursued and hunted, usually without resolution, an "it", a bag, a box, a body part. And the language of the stories moves from straight action and

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description into poetic prose. It's very hip writing, laying out with a kind of  
glee the damage love can do.

Labels: **Barbara Henning, fiction, Rebecca Brown, review, The Terrible Girls**

*posted by Barbara Henning @ 8:38 PM*



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